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# South Florida Visual Artists: Meaning and Practices When Making Artwork

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

SOUTH FLORIDA VISUAL ARTISTS: MEANING AND PRACTICES WHEN  
MAKING ARTWORK

By

Christina Sanchez Volatier

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty  
of the University of Miami  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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This dissertation explored the process of art-making for visual artists through a sociological perspective. Visual artists are distinct in that they interact with and manipulate physical materials on a daily basis in order to visually communicate and share with other people. A visual artist's creative artistic process is typically considered an expression of individualism and inter-subjectivity, however, this project investigated the social context of making artwork. The aim of this dissertation was to ground artists' processes in their experiences and practices. This study used a qualitative method to explore artists' work in order to understand the ways these artists engaged in and constructed socially shared meaning when making original artwork. Specifically, the methodology used was grounded theory, which relies on simultaneous data collection and analysis. Twenty in-depth interviews and three follow-up interviews were conducted with professional visual artists in the South Florida area as the source of data for this project. The findings were a result of identifying initial codes, determining focused codes, writing memos, forming categories, developing theoretical themes, and visual mapping from the data. Five major themes were analyzed and form a conceptual framework: Shaping

Practices, Development and Mastery, Doing Art, Immersion, and Fulfillments. The conceptual framework shows that artists' creative process is not linear but instead continuous and reciprocal. Overall, artists' art-making process is dynamic and occurs through multiple dimensions of experience when they apply learned artistic conventions, and when creating originality in their artwork. Artists' process reflects the ways people interact and internalize socially shared meaning in the context of making artwork, and the ways in which artists break conventions by engendering novelty with their art.

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother Tina Sanchez who is the source of my inspiration. Her life and accomplishments continue to empower my journey. I aspire to live as courageously as she lived.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Symbolic Interactionism  
Grounded Theory

SI  
GT

## Chapter One: Introduction

Visual artists are distinct in that they interact with and manipulate physical materials on a daily basis in order to visually communicate and share with other people. A visual artist's creative artistic process is typically considered an expression of individualism and inter-subjectivity. However, this dissertation project explores the context of art-making by applying a sociological perspective. What patterns and theoretical understandings develop by grounding artists' processes in their experiences and practices? Additionally, what insights does examining the creative artistic process offer for a sociological understanding of shared social meaning? Symbolic interactionism is the cornerstone theory in sociology for understanding social behavior as process-based and as occurring through common meanings and symbols among people. This dissertation grew out of an ongoing study begun in a Social Psychology seminar (in which the researcher started this line of questioning) and evolved over three years through continuous data collection and simultaneous analysis as directed by a constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz 2014).

Interviewing visual artists is a fresh way to explore sociological insights, particularly in the context of symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionist and pragmatist theoretical perspectives of society have a long-standing tradition in the field of sociology; however, often these perspectives are dismissed as micro theories that only capture the everyday processes of social life without providing an account of social structure. However, recent interpretations of symbolic interactionist theory by Kathy Charmaz (1980) and David Snow (2001) have clarified how symbolic interactionism provides an image of reliable social structure. According to Snow (2001), within Herbert

Blumer's ([1969] 1998) classic conceptualization of symbolic interactionism, the principles of interactive determination, symbolization, and emergence collectively provide a paradoxical image of social life as both dynamic and ever-changing, as well as seemingly constant, patterned, and reliable. These three principles serve as the foundation of symbolic interactionism and rest on the understanding of shared meaning and language as the bases for social interaction.

For symbolic interactionists, language is the interpretive way in which we share meaning with others (known as the principle of interactive determination), develop consistent significance for the objects and situations we encounter (principle of symbolization), and enact new and dynamic meaning (principle of emergence) (Blumer [1969] 1998; Charmaz 1980; Snow 2001). For this dissertation, these principles are guiding insights and are not treated as testable categories. Thus, a more open-ended approach enables exploration of how visual artists view their art-making processes in terms of their actions, thoughts, and interactions with other people, materials, and situations. The principles of symbolic interactionism serve as the theoretical backdrop for analyzing how artists create meaning when making artwork.

This study uses a qualitative method to explore artists' processes in order to understand the ways these artists engage in and construct their own meaning. Thus, consistent with a qualitative method, a theoretical background informs and shapes the approach to analysis and does not serve as a theoretical proposition to deductively test, as it would with a quantitative approach. The researcher utilizes a qualitative approach in order to investigate and gain new understandings of visual artists' experiences; this is in direct contrast to a quantitative analysis, which seeks to explain artists' social behaviors.

Along with a qualitative method, the researcher proposes several guiding research questions, these are: (1) what are visual artists' experiences with their art-making processes when coming up with an idea, planning a project, and creating the actual piece? (2) how do artists experience and give meaning to novelty in their actions? (3) how do aspects of the artist's environment, as well as the availability of materials and tools shape their artwork in unexpected ways?

A sociological approach to art views artistic work as enabled through conventions, interactions, and shared meaning within art worlds (Becker 1982; Crane 1989). The researcher proposed to extend this understanding of artists and their processes by investigating artists' ways of knowing through practical experience and actions, as well as through their relationships with their situations, available tools and materials. Previous sociological researchers of art have concentrated on the results of production, and the consumption of artwork, and on cooperative networks (Becker 1982). By contrast, this dissertation investigates artists' actions and the meanings they create by focusing on how artists conceive of and execute their ideas and artwork. The goal is to explore the way that artists experience "knowing" in their regular practices and how they come up with innovative actions. Uniquely, for visual artists, their interactions and constructions of knowledge are "socially and materially organized" (Sutherland and Acord 2007), and these constructions provide critical insights for studying the varied ways in which people interact with and generate new meaning.

From a dually symbolic interactionist and pragmatist perspective, the process of thinking comes from interactions during social experiences. These schools of thought recognize an interpretive and reflective actor throughout their experiences, meanings, and

social interactions. The image of a person, then, is not as an actor who reacts with a predictable response to a particular stimulus from his or her environment; rather, a person is self-conscious, meaning that he or she actively thinks, judges, selects, and interprets the situation he or she is in when takes actions. In a pragmatist's view, people make decisions through trial and error and develop habitual practices from their judgments of the successes and failures of these decisions (Dewey [1929] 1958; Peirce [1868] 1955). A symbolic interactionist and pragmatist understanding of what makes up a person compels a view of artists as learning from their social contexts and recognizing that they demonstrate their shared learning through a web of their own interpretations and judgments in conjunction with their social interactions. Therefore, a sociological perspective enables an understanding of artists' processes as experiential.

Experiential knowledge refers to understanding knowledge not as an object of possession but rather as a way of "knowing" that is practically-oriented (Dewey and Bentley 1949). For visual artists, knowledge is inseparable from the social context of conventions, available materials, technological developments, and their own experiences, thoughts, and actions. Considering knowledge as action enables a framework for understanding artists' engagement with their creative practice and artwork by exploring their processes in the context of their practical activities.

Significant types of experiential knowledge that this dissertation project addresses are habits, the body, the fluid connection between the body and thoughts, and novel actions. Habits are the result of people's interactional encounters with situations in which they practice various interpretations to find which will have the most desirable outcomes, from which they learn to repeat those actions unless they fail (McGowan 1998). Howard

Becker's (1982) work establishes that shared conventions are central to artists' habits. He writes, "People must learn the techniques characteristic of the kind of work they are going to do, whether it be the creation of ideas, execution, some one of the many support activities, or appreciation, response, and criticism" (p.5). Sociology of art mainly addresses collective activity in the context of artistic practices. However, the sociological research of art does not address how the artists interact with these conventions and make them their own in practice, nor does it examine the way in which artists generate their own meanings.

For example, little sociological research addresses the body in the development of people's habits of knowledge and actions (Shilling 1993). Much of the focus on the body in sociology is on what has been done to it in terms of socialization, and social constructions such as gender, health and illness, violence, and technology. In these areas, the body is often treated as an object, and it is not taken into account what the body *does* (Featherstone and Turner 1995). An underdeveloped area of research is studying the body as an active part of social life and of social learning (Featherstone and Turner 1995). Loïc Wacquant's (1995) study provides an critical contribution to body research with his findings about amateur boxers in Chicago's South Side. Wacquant found that when boxing, these athletes experienced a "state of body" more than a "state of mind." Thus, their bodies were involved in tacit experience, which is not separate from what people do or think.

To view the body as involved in experiential knowledge means not seeing the body as demonstrative of a dichotomy between the physical and the social, but rather recognizing the physical and social as interrelated. This recognition compels an

understanding of the experience with the body not simply as a receiving knowledge, but instead as a generating knowledge and meaning (Pagis 2009; Shilling 1993). For example, Michael Pagis' (2009) ethnographic study and in-depth interviews of Vipassana-style meditation practitioners demonstrates that people use their own body awareness as means of interacting with themselves. With bodily sensations, practitioners learn self-monitoring without the use of explicit internal conversation. For Pagis, the meditator then engages him- or herself through the body and he refers to this as embodied self-reflexivity. During mediation, the body is the source of knowing that creates meaning, rather than a receiver of knowledge. Thus, in this context the body constructs meaning through practical experiences, gaining experiential knowledge. Visual artists' practices also occur through their body actions and thoughts (Sullivan 2010). Overall, an expanding of sociological research involves recognizing and investigating the body as active in experiencing knowledge.

Another underdeveloped area of research in the sociological literature relating to artists' practices is the connection between habits of body and habits of thought. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's (1997) concept of flow captures the experience of body and thought as fluid or seemingly synchronized and effortless in moments of deep absorption in the activity at hand. For Csikszentmihalyi, states of flow occur when a person with highly developed skills or experiences is challenged enough physically or mentally to perform his or her activity without direction from his or her internal conversation.

Flow states are described when a person with well-developed habits of body, mind, or both, no longer needs to explicitly reflect on his or her actions at hand - they *just*

*do it*. Flow is akin to what athletes refer to as “being in the zone.” Dancers, athletes, musicians, and people at work describe experiencing flow when they are deeply absorbed “in the moment” with whatever they are doing. However, recent scholarship on flow demonstrates that despite similarities across descriptions of flow states in particular activities, important differences also occur (Banfield and Burgess 2013). For example, some findings show that during flow, the body comes into alignment with the mind; other studies, however have shown that the body brings the mind into sync.

The body alone is not enough for flow experience: thought and mental activity are also necessary (Csikszentmihalyi 2002). Sibyl Kleiner’s (2009) in-depth interviews with ballet dancers found that the dancers used self-conscious thought to train the body to embody certain movements when dancing. These movements were learned through engagement with social contexts, such as the expectations of teachers and audiences. When dancers successfully embodied socially learned techniques of movement, they began to experience a lessening of their internal self-conscious conversation during practices and performances. Thus, ballet dancers learned to synchronize their minds and bodies in the context of socially shared meaning and through a flow of habitual movements (Kleiner 2009:236), more colloquially known as “muscle memory.”

In addition, a 2013 study by Janet Banfield and Mark Burgess found that visual artists’ physical activities are fundamental to initiating flow experiences. Spinelli (2005) also emphasizes that the heightened experience of repetitive physical movements and the increase of focus and attention to actions contributes to a sense of flow. Contemporary reconceptualizations of flow are emphasizing the importance of body knowledge during activity over abstract concepts of mental activity (Banfield and Burgess 2013; Dietriche

2004; Spinelli 2005). A new view of flow by researchers points to the body as a significant source of thought and meaning (McCormack 2008).

Another significant aspect of artists' processes of experiential knowledge is the creation of original works through novelty and/or innovation. Overall, artists strive to make their work their own. As much as artists' actions use significant established knowledge and conventions widely accepted in their art worlds, they still view their contributions and actions as novel. Novelty refers to the way that artists' actions break away from conventions, often accomplished in small ways. In comparison innovation is viewed as the use of creativity that transforms an entire field of practice (Csikszentmihalyi 1999). Traditional perspectives describe novelty as creativity. In sociology and psychology, there are numerous views and theories about creativity. For example, from a traditional psychology perspective, creativity is considered an attribute or essential talent of the individual (Maslow 1974). Some sociologists focus on the outcomes of creativity, such as the recognition and evaluation of products as novel by experts, or by more general social reactions (Cropley 2006).

From other sociological standpoints, creativity is characterized as a progression towards innovation and making artifacts (Edmond and Candy 2002). Mayer (1999) identifies three areas of creativity research: people, process, and products (p.450). The focus of the dissertation project is to study the contextual process for artists when making original work. Examining the process of novelty shows the relationship between the shared meaning among people and art worlds by evaluating cultural texts and the consistent ways that artists make meanings and actions their own. Novel actions may include utilizing different types or sources of knowledge when engaging in the creative

processes, referred to as parallel lines (Edmond and Candy 2002). Innovative work of the artists may occur with changes in constraints (Boden 2004) or available tools, materials, and tools (Puddephatt 2005). A process of novelty includes the exploration of ideas, knowledge, practices, and options (Edmond and Candy 2002).

Aaron Puddephatt's (2005) interpretation of George Herbert Mead's (1932, 1938) concepts of "temporality" and "the present act" emphasizes that novelty also occurs as unexpected results during the spontaneity of our actions. Pragmatists and symbolic interactionists in general view novel actions as occurring as people encounter new or unexpected situations, especially in the material context of the present moment (Charmaz 1980; Dewey [1929] 1958; Mead 1936; Peirce [1868] 1955; Snow 2001). Overall, people create novelty by engaging with their ability to interpret their situation and construct or give new meaning to it with their thoughts and their actions.

Understanding visual artists' processes, thoughts, and actions as experiential knowledge illuminates several possible understudied areas of sociological research. The themes as discussed above are the recognition that artists are active interpreters who develop habits within the context of shared social meaning, that their active interpretations also occur with the body, the connection between body and thought, and that they create novelty in their actions and thoughts. Little research exists that addresses these themes together. This dissertation project makes these themes central to the investigation of visual artists' practices as demonstrated in the research questions and in the in-depth interviews with South Florida visual artists.

*South Florida Visual Artists*

In South Florida there are many different types of artists and a lively art scene. Both the Miami and Ft. Lauderdale areas host a number of art museums, galleries, and fine art schools and programs. Also, the South Florida area holds many art events recognized both nationally and worldwide, such as Art Basel (Smith 2006). Additionally, Miami has two neighborhoods - Wynwood and the Design District - which are known for their art galleries in the city. Furthermore, South Florida's art scene has gained considerable recognition in the past decade compared to previous years (Clemence et. al 2007; Smith 2006). South Florida also has a diverse range of people and artists; these artists include those from different countries around the world and different parts of the United States.

South Florida is an excellent source of artists to interview because of its established and growing art scene, as well as because of the ethnic and cultural diversity of its population. South Florida visual artists are rich sources of information and experience when considering the process of creating artwork. Julie Davidow (2007), in her book *Miami Contemporary Artists*, writes:

Miami has always provided safe haven for artists. Existing for decades outside of the forces of the art market, the city has been a frontier where artists staked claim to blighted neighborhoods, responding to the streets, the climate, the decadence and despair, and each other. A freedom to explore and experiment has been an intrinsic part of this culture. Here artists have been able to create their own definitions (p. ii).

This description of Miami artists draws attention to the influence and engagement by artists within the social and environmental contexts of South Florida. Also, Davidow points out that South Florida enables artists to explore and create new meaning, which relates well to the research questions of this study. Overall, South Florida visual artists

provide a wealth of information about artistic practices, thoughts and actions when making artwork.

### *Review of Theory and Literature*

Chapter Two reviews influential theoretical perspectives and relevant empirical research used for the dissertation project. In this chapter, I heavily discuss the paradigm of pragmatism and the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism. I describe these at length because the findings of this dissertation project contributes to pragmatist and symbolic interactionist understanding of action and meaning by investigating the experiences of visual artists. Pragmatist and symbolic interactionist theoretically orient around the significance of action and meaning in social life. Since symbolic interactionism is rooted in early American pragmatist thought, these two perspectives are closely related but also have important differences. Therefore, I include each framework's theoretical perspective of knowledge, of people's relationships to social life and the world, of the nature of society, and of major concepts such as socialization, reflexivity, the self, and the foundational principles of symbolic interactionism.

Next, I introduce two central themes of social life underscoring pragmatism and symbolic interactionism, specifically people's active and socially developed habitual practices and the emergence of novel meaning and actions. In this section, I address these themes through the context of salient categories of experiential knowledge. Categories include people's habits of actions and thought, their knowing through body movements and gestures, their experience of connection between thoughts and actions as captured in the concept of flow, and their novel and innovative actions. In this section, I discuss both theoretical concepts and empirical research. I include the ways that people internalize

their actions into forming dynamic habits from which they can both draw upon and modify (Dewey [1929] 1958). Then, I address habitual practices in terms of body actions (such as motion memory) and gestures by drawing on empirical and conceptual contributions (Roth 2001; Papis 2009). Next, I discuss the concept of flow and research that indicates habits of body and/or thought in moments of flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1997). Lastly, I discuss novelty in people's actions and the occurrence of unexpected results, for which I mainly utilize pragmatists and the symbolic interactionist concept of emergence.

### *Methodology*

Chapter Three addresses the methodological design of this dissertation project. The approach used is qualitative, specifically rooted in grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2014). Grounded theory begins with guiding research questions rather than hypotheses. Accordingly, data collection and analysis follow inductive logic. Inductive research starts with inquiry and direct data collection, in contrast to deductive research, which aims to test existing theoretical concepts. However, grounded theory uniquely includes simultaneously direct data collection and analysis in order to keep findings closely related to the actions and meanings created by the participants. The analytical process for a grounded theory researcher includes the constant comparison between emergent patterns and the data. Overall, the distinguishing feature of grounded theory is that the researcher constructs his or her analysis by generating new theories from the data collected (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

The process of data analysis for grounded theorists depends on the researcher's epistemological assumption about the role of knowledge in research. Two different positions of grounded theory are widely used: objectivist and constructivist (Charmaz

2014). In this project, I utilized a constructivist approach to grounded theory. A constructivist position places knowledge in research as jointly created by the participants and by the researchers within the study. Constructivists recognize the researcher as active in constructing analysis of the data. An objectivist, by contrast, views his or her findings as emerging from the data and independent of the researcher. Constructivists acknowledge their own influence by recognizing that they develop their research questions, craft their interview questions, determine theoretical sampling, and use their knowledge and expertise to construct theoretical categories from the data (Charmaz 2014). A constructivist grounded theorist remain rigorous in their examination of the data by keeping their findings close to the descriptions given by interviewees.

In addition to borrowing from methodological influences in grounded theory, this project also draws upon pragmatism and symbolic interactionism. Grounded theory is associated with pragmatist and symbolic interactionist thought (Charmaz 2014). Qualitative methods in sociology are traditionally founded on symbolic interactionist assumptions as outlined by Herbert Blumer ([1969] 1998). Additionally, Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1990) expanded grounded theory along the lines of the logic and more contemporary Symbolic Interactionist assumptions. Symbolic interactionism provides a way to think theoretically about the data and it provides certain insights for an analysis of social life (Charmaz 2014). Additionally, the influences of pragmatism and symbolic interactionism are relevant to the study of visual artists because these frameworks orient their practices as action, thought, and process. The epistemological and ontological assumptions of pragmatism and symbolic interactionism are compatible with a grounded theory approach to conducting research.

In grounded theory, the framework for data analysis mainly includes coding, writing memos, developing categories, theoretical sampling, and constructing theoretical themes. Grounded theory is distinguished by both flexible strategies and a more systematic analysis of the data (Charmaz and Belgrave 2012). However, constructivist grounded theorists recognize that in this rigorous analysis what the researcher defines as significant ultimately influences the analytical findings. For example, coding is the way that a researcher identifies what is happening in the data, and memos are where the researcher begins to describe what those patterns or phenomena mean. Categories are the practice of raising codes to a more conceptual level. Theoretical sampling is a practice of saturating categories that are analyzed by gathering additional data either by conducting follow-up interviews or full interviews with new participants, and then continuing a process of comparison between constructed codes and data. Theoretical themes are a researcher's way of stitching the fractured data back together by showing how phenomena relate and/or diverge (Charmaz 2014; Glaser 1978). Lastly, the researcher constructs theoretical themes to make wider connections and provides conceptual explanations of the data.

Following IRB approval, I conducted twenty in-depth interviews and three follow-up interviews with visual artists in the South Florida area as the main source of data for this dissertation project. The goal of these interviews was to gain insight into these artists' practices, actions, thoughts, and processes when they create their work. Throughout the data collection process, I transcribed the interviews, developed preliminary codes, and, using memos, then I began to form categories. I conducted further theoretical sampling by doing three follow-up interviews with artists from the

study in order to ensure saturation of these categories, as well as to address an emergent research question the researcher identified. Finally, from these interviews, I developed overall themes from visual artists' descriptions of how they make meaning and action in their artistic practices.

### *Findings*

In Chapter Four I present the results of the data analysis as the findings of the study. These are recognized as the themes I constructed from in-depth interview data, using a grounded theory analysis. The five major themes are: *shaping practices, development and mastery, doing art, immersion, and fulfillments*. These themes form a process model that outlines the multiple ways in which artists develop their artistic practices through social learning and experience. Additionally, artists' continuous practices and their range of approaches when composing art, as well as the ways that artists view the results of their actions are examined within the context of social psychological concerns (such as the following of conventions or creating novel aspects of their work).

*Shaping practices* refers to the social-experiential foundation that artists build by interacting with socially learned knowledge and experiential knowledge. Socially learned practices mostly occur through interactions with people in an artist's respective art worlds, such as artistic family members, mentors, teachers, and peers. Experiential learning refers to learning from body movements and physical gestures, life experiences, and visual influences. These various shaping practices comprise the foundation from which artists apply their knowledge about art-making. The theme *development and mastery* captures a particular stage for professional artists, a stage at which they feel that

they can improve their skills and abilities by deliberate practice, by working with new media and materials, and by advancing their ideas and goals.

Another theme, *doing art*, captures the multiple categories artists' use when in the immediate process of creating their artwork; specifically, there are four categories: known as planning and control, habitual engagement, play, and judgments. These four categories represent the many ways in which artists, through their thought processes and actions, treat the creation of their art project as either more familiar (anticipated) or less familiar (new) as well as the resultant conventional or novel aspects of their work. The degree to which an artist uses the varying categories of *doing art* can range anywhere on the spectrum, from applying artistic conventions (as in planning and habitual engagement) to achieving novelty (during play and judgments).

The theme *immersion* captures an experience when doing art practiced by most, but not necessarily all, artists interviewed. Artists who experienced immersion consider flow to be a special moment of optimal skill use both when adhering to artistic convention and creating novelty in their artwork. Artists described a quieting of their minds during flow, which occurs automatically and effortlessly. When in flow, also known as the feeling of being 'in the zone,' artists feel meditative and attribute their actions to previously mastered shaping practices, thus often resulting in the reproduction of artistic convention. However, at the same time, the interviewees also reported that during flow they feel they are performing at the height of their skills, without constant self-monitoring, thereby creating something unexpected and novel in their artwork. Artists, then, consider immersion to be particularly fulfilling precisely because artists can quiet their minds, showcase their skills, and achieve unexpected results.

The final theme in the process model is *fulfillments*, which connotes the social psychological satisfaction, validation, and motivation (both personally and socially) that artists derive from making art. Artists experienced a range of emotions such as frustration, monotony, and pleasure. Central to artists' emotional experiences was personal enjoyment. Artists often learn to enjoy making artwork by creating it alongside family or friends, on their own by engaging flow with subsequent feelings of fun and/or catharsis, and by evaluating their own work according to the standard conventions of their art worlds. *Fulfillments* also directly stems from social interactions by way of social feedback to the artist's work. Often social encouragement provides supportive feedback that, to artists, is effective in following conventions and creating novelty.

The five main themes of the artist's process model are reciprocal and cyclical. An artist's process occurs often as nonlinear and flexible. Although artists go through the various themes throughout their careers, the degree to which these themes are significant can vary in consideration of learning about new techniques, media, or materials, and acquiring more mature levels of mastery and practice. Moreover, artists will move between and apply various approaches while working on their art project. Overall, the process model reflects the different approaches artists take in their art-making processes while outlining and organizing consistent themes.

### *Discussion*

Chapter Five provides a discussion of the findings by connecting the theoretical themes to relevant literature and empirical work in sociology. This dissertation project makes a contribution to scholars' understanding of socially shared and shaped actions and practices, as well as to the collective understanding of the utilization of meaning

generation through creative work. Howard Becker's (1982) concept of art worlds, in conjunction with Herbert Blumer's ([1969] 1998) three principles of symbolic interactionism as extended by Kathy Charmaz (1980) and David Snow (2001), is used to examine the findings resulting from visual artists' reported descriptions of their artistic processes.

The conceptual framework of symbolic interactionism provided by Herbert Blumer ([1969] 1998) will be referred to as David Snow's (2001) descriptions - the principle of interactive determinism, the principle of symbolization, and the principle of emergence. An artist's process reflects the principle of interactive determinism in that the artist's knowledge that is used and relied upon to make art mainly comes from social sources. Thus, a pragmatist emphasis is also needed in order to convey that the centrality of action in learning is crucial for people to acquire shared social meaning. Artists demonstrate that experiencing learning occurs through use of the physical body and results in embodied knowledge, a concept often overlooked by symbolic interactionists. Artists' processes demonstrate the principle of symbolization in that artists internalize social conventions regarding art-making and act on them when making artwork. The principle of symbolization shows how artists' behaviors and thinking are socially coordinated within their art worlds. Lastly, the principle of emergence is a significant part of an artist's creative process. Emergence occurs when artists break with convention and create novelty in their art. For symbolic interaction, this means that artists generate new meaning by suspending their use of shared conventions.

The findings of this study establish a contextual framework for understanding artists' processes when making creative work, thus giving insight into the symbolic

interactionist theory of social life. The findings support Howard Becker's (1982) research that artists learn and interact in cooperative artistic networks, and that the convention and cultural texts of these networks constitutes an art world. Also, the artist's creative process model exemplifies the social foundation for making thoughts, actions, habits, and original, novel work. Furthermore, experiential knowledge, as shown by artists' reports of embodied actions, provides further insight into the multiple types of interactions from which artists learn social conventions. Lastly, this study reveals how an artist can regularly engage their actions and thoughts in order to produce originality in their work.

## Chapter Two: Review of Theory and Literature

In this chapter, I will describe influential theoretical perspectives and relevant empirical research for my dissertation project. In the first section, *Theory and Research*, I will briefly describe the philosophy underlying the relationship between theory and methodology. Next, I will discuss the way that theory and literature are used in the process of my dissertation project since grounded theory differs from traditional qualitative and quantitative research approaches. In the following section, *Theoretical Influences*, I will include the subsections *Pragmatism and Symbolic Interactionism* and *Habitual Practices & Emergence*. The first subsection is theoretically and philosophically driven, and in it I address the primary assumptions and concepts of pertinent pragmatists and symbolic interactionists. The second subsection includes both theoretical concepts and empirical literature with these topics: *Habits of Action*, *Embodied Knowledge*, *Flow*, and *Emergence*.

### *Theory and Research*

I consider the body of work I cover in this chapter fundamental for my analytical thought about interview data and my research questions. The main theoretical influences, pragmatism of action and symbolic interactionism, are epistemologically and ontologically consistent with a grounded theory methodology. Epistemology is a philosophical assumption that describes the way that we as people and researchers come to know the world. Ontology is a social image or metaphor about the social world, social reality, and social order, which is logically based on a specific epistemology. Methodology is the appropriate way to get at knowledge or to research the social world, again rooted in the assumptions of epistemology and ontology. Taken together,

epistemology, ontology, and methodology represent the logic of a social philosophical perspective of social science, which informs a researcher how and why to conduct research in certain way.

I used pragmatist thought about pragmatism and symbolic interactionism when forming my research questions. These theories and the subsequent related concepts influence how I think about the data and how I will interpret patterns and connections from the data. Pragmatist epistemology recognizes “knowing” as integral to social science research because the researcher cannot be completely separated from what he or she knows (Dewey [1922] 2012; Dewey and Bentley 1949). This non-dualistic assumption is consistent with understanding the role of the researcher as an active interpreter of the analytical findings in constructivist grounded theory. Pragmatism is the foundational thought for symbolic interactionism and this relationship will be described further below. However, symbolic interactionists understand people’s actions as “constructing self, situation, and society” (Charmaz 2014:262). Symbolic interactionist ontology views social life as habitualized through shared meaning and practices, as well as emergent in our ability to engage in dynamic meaning-making.

Additionally, symbolic interactionism is both a theoretical perspective and a method (Blumer [1969] 1998), and is also consistent with grounded theory methodology (Charmaz 2008, 2014). Charmaz (2008) emphasizes that for grounded theory researchers theory construction is enabled by using symbolic interactionism because this perspective includes emergent inquiry and content, and provides useful tools for the conceptualization of data (p. 52). Symbolic interactionism views theorizing as an active process by interactive researchers; thus, the concepts and empirical influences do not

dictate findings but rather serve to help make sense of them. Additionally, symbolic interactionism is a theory-driven approach to research that enables “fresh theoretical implications,” (Charmaz 2014:262) because of the recognition of people as dynamic, interpretive and action-based in society; this perspective is therefore appropriate with a constructivist grounded theory method.

The role of theoretical influences is particular in a grounded theory research approach. A grounded theory researcher uses theory and previous empirical findings throughout the entire research process. To develop their research questions, researchers recognize theoretical influences in determining samples and in analyzing interview data. Since the researcher is an expert in his or her field of study her knowledge is identified as important to the research process (Charmaz 2014). Theoretical concepts and categories are not used to deductively test with data in qualitative methods and grounded theory. The role of previous literature in grounded theory methodology will be discussed further in Chapter Three, *Methodology*.

### *Theoretical Influences*

The primary theoretical influences used are pragmatism of action and symbolic interactionism.<sup>1</sup> This section includes two subsections: *Pragmatism and Symbolic Interactionism* and *Habitual Practices & Emergence*. First, I will discuss pragmatism and symbolic interactionism in terms of their main assumptions, their concepts, and their similarities and differences. I will discuss Herbert Blumer’s ([1969] 1998) three premises of symbolic interaction and Kathy Charmaz’s (1980) contemporary extensions.

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<sup>1</sup> Pragmatism is not a unified philosophical body of work, ideas, or concepts (Martindale 1961:297). The reference to pragmatism in this dissertation project describes mainly contributions by pragmatist thinkers John Dewey, Charles Peirce, and George Herbert Mead. Broadly, the use of the term pragmatist thought involves placing action as central to human social conduct, emphasizing people as active and creative agents, and a view of the social life as shaped by people’s doings and interactions (Reynolds 2003).

Next, a symbolic interactionist position highlights both the development of habitual practice and the emergence of dynamic meaning-making and novel actions. In this subsection, I will focus on the themes: *Habits of action*, *Embodied Knowledge*, *Flow*, and *Emergence*. I will consider the ways people internalize their actions of habit (Dewey [1929] 1958). Then, I explore these habitual practices in terms of body actions such as motion memory and gestures (Pagis 2009; Roth 2001). Next, I address research that shows habits of body and/or thought in moments of flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1997). Lastly, I will consider ways that artists explain novelty in their actions and in unexpected results, for which I mainly utilize pragmatist and the symbolic interactionist concept of emergence as explicated by John Dewey ([1938] 1991), Hans Joas (1996), George Herbert Mead (1932, 1934, 1938) Charles Peirce ([1868] 1958), and Antony Puddephatt (2005). Emergence is outlined as four themes of novelty and innovation: the occurrence of challenges to habitual practices and the applying of new interpretation such as in problem-solving and exploration, newly available materials and tools having unexpected results in actions and meaning, “in the moment” constructions of actions and meaning, and spontaneity of actions.

### *Pragmatism and Symbolic Interactionism*

Early symbolic interactionism (SI), as associated with the Chicago School, is a theoretical perspective attributed to the foundational work of George Herbert Mead and his student Herbert Blumer.<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this dissertation project a Chicago

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<sup>2</sup> The Chicago School tradition in symbolic interactionism is oriented around the foundational work and thought of George Herbert Mead (Fisher and Strauss 1979). In general, the Chicago School tradition views social order as socially constructed at the level of symbolism. In contrast, Manford Kuhn and Thomas McPartland (1954) and Sheldon Stryker (1980) interpret symbolic interactionism in terms of structural realism (associated with the Iowa School tradition), which contradicts Herbert Blumer’s premises. The Iowa School of symbolic interactionism follows an ontological realist standpoint by taking a quantitative approach to SI research. In contrast, Blumer stresses the importance of a flexible methodology aligned with

School tradition of SI is provided because this approach emphasizes people's agency, the significance of meaning and language, and the process of interpretation. These central tenets are meaningful for studying visual artists' processes because artists exercise their agency by creating unique artwork, and they create their visual pieces with unique sets of practices, techniques, and meanings. Since I use grounded theory, an inductive method, I do not apply explanatory theories with specific variables to predict outcomes; rather, I utilize an open-ended theoretical approach. SI enables a view of people as active, dynamic, and engaged in practical activities from which their actions shape their sense of self and situation. A SI perspective that emphasizes process and change is particularly useful for addressing my research questions that explore artists' practices and experiences when making artwork, and the meaning artists give to novelty in their actions and thoughts.

Symbolic interactionism as a sociological standpoint differs from traditional ontological nominalism and realism by assuming a pragmatist foundation. Pragmatists' theorists break from the traditional subject-object dichotomy utilized by nominalist and realists, in which these traditional theorists treat knowledge as external to a person. Instead, pragmatists propose that, for a person, "knowing" is central to action (Dewey and Bentley 1949). Pragmatists use the post-Kantian idealist epistemological premise that we interpret our world and that our thoughts and mind cannot be separated from ourselves (Shalin 1986). Moreover, pragmatists assert that our interpretations of our situation and the knowledge we learn continually make the social world, which is counter

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non-realist ontology of symbolic interactionism by proposing a qualitative methodology. In this sense Blumer establishes symbolic interactionism not only as a perspective, but a logically consistent theory and methods package (Charmaz 2008).

to the social realist view that society exists as a constant and separate determining force, and counter to the nominalist perspective that society spurns from the will of individuals. Early pragmatist scholar John Dewey ([1922] 2012) rejects an assumption of the mind and body as separate entities and he points out that a person is intertwined with the world through her actions and through her active interpretation of the habits of her community and culture. American pragmatists' adoption of idealism comes as a reaction to psychological behaviorism, which overlooks that a person lives in the world as self-conscious, active, and aware. For pragmatists, a person is both the subject and object, and as such the subject and object are tied to one another in a fundamental relationship.

However, pragmatists differ from idealists on an important point. Where idealists give precedence to thought and knowledge, pragmatists favor the primacy of action (Shalin 1986). As Charles Peirce ([1887] 1955) states, "thought is essentially action" (p. 29). For pragmatists, people form meaning from practical action to solve problems; this is how they come to know the world (Reynolds 2003). Social life "becomes" through people's actions and the meanings they attribute to this process. Furthermore, pragmatists view the individual and society as engaged in a constant process of mutual constitution (Cooley [1909] 1962; Dewey [1897] 1972; Mead 1936; Park [1929] 1952). A pragmatist view emphasizes that the social is an ongoing relationship in which people make society and society in turn shapes people. As the Thomas theorem states, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences," (Thomas and Thomas 1928:572). Mead ([1934] 1969), as an early pragmatist, starts to place the social self at the center of the indeterminate social process.

For George Herbert Mead (1936), the person and the situation have a mutually reciprocal relationship. For early pragmatists, the situation refers to the physical environment and the social field of experience (Dewey [1929] 1958), in which action is based on practical need in relation to these. Later symbolic interactionists like Herbert Blumer ([1969] 1998) tend to focus on the social situation instead of on the physical environment, and on social interactions as the bases of action (Puddephatt 2009). Nonetheless, the early pragmatist view influences symbolic interactionist ontology that the social world is fluid, ongoing, and indeterminate until it is interacted with (Shalin 1986). This image of indeterminacy and determinacy as fundamental to the social process is established in the work of pragmatists William James ([1890] 1950), Charles Peirce ([1868] 1955), John Dewey ([1929] 1958) and George Herbert Mead ([1924] 1964; 1934). For contemporary symbolic interactionists, this means that seemingly long-lasting social structures are constructed and reproduced by people's continuing social actions and interactions (Snow 2001).

Symbolic interactionism is distinguished from pragmatism because of the focus on the ongoing process of meaning making by way of shared symbols, language, the social self, and joint social interaction<sup>3</sup>. Our actions and thoughts exist at the intersections of wider group perspectives that we experience throughout our lives (Shalin 1986). As Herbert Blumer ([1969] 1998) describes, SI assumes dynamic and reciprocal relationships between interpretations and actions and social life (p. 22). Thus, for an SI perspective social life emerges once it is interacted with (Fisher and Strauss 1979). For

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<sup>3</sup> For symbolic interactionism there are a variety of differences between traditions, theories, and lines of work (Martindale 1961). For this dissertation project symbolic interactionism refers to concepts by specific classic symbolic interactionists following the Chicago School tradition mainly George Herbert Mead, Herbert Blumer, Charles Cooley, and contemporary interactionist that expand on these classic scholars' concepts such as by Kathy Charmaz, David Snow, Ralph Turner.

symbolic interactionists, the individual is understood as the historical byproduct of society through his or her social interaction. Blumer ([1969] 1998) emphasizes that social interaction does not simply express our ideas and behaviors, but that it actually forms our conduct. Social interactions shape people through their spoken and unspoken shared meaning of symbols and language. Our interactions then exist within social, cultural, and historical contexts but are not determined by these (Charmaz 2104:266). Overall, Mead's (1934) theoretical view understands meaning as emerging from dealing with our own socially-situated experiences and interactions. Thus, people's interactions are dialogical and occur with a self-conscious person who interprets and acts in tandem with the social world (Mead [1934] 1969).

In the field of sociology symbolic interactionism is often criticized as a "micro" theoretical perspective lacking a conceptual account of the stability of social life (e.g. such as the continuation and consistency of social institutions). For traditional sociology, the symbolic interactionist ontology (that the social is ever changing and constructed through continuous collective actions) seems elusive in comparison to realist perspective such as Talcott Parson's ([1951] 2013) metaphor of a stable and constant system. The social system is an image of society as if it exists like the physical/material/natural world, in which social life has an order in and of itself without the necessity of people's interactions and influences. A traditional sociological perspective views symbolic interactionism as unable to provide an account of social structure, such as social institutions. However, traditional perspectives overlook symbolic interactionists perspective of social order as existing at the level of symbolism (Snow 2001), or human action, which for symbolic interactionist means that shared meaning and language are the

constant basis of social life. The way people engage with one another and create shared symbols is through the linguistic process and a conversation of gestures. Thus, once people have shared meaning (principle of interactive determinism) they develop the ability to understand, anticipate, and interpret other peoples' behaviors (principle of symbolization) and this routinization of interactions becomes the image of social structure in which the social world appears as consistent and long-lasting.

For George Herbert Mead ([1934] 1969) people engage in social order by taking the role of the other, which they acquire through direct discourse with people. Thus, the web of relationships (Snow 2001) or in Mead's ([1934] 1969) words "joint action" with others in essences provides the sense of a constant social structure; at the same time this image takes into account the flexibility in which together people change those interactions and the meaning they assign situations, objects, and relationships. Contemporary symbolic interactionist David Snow (2001) emphasizes that the principle of symbolization, originally conceptualized by Herbert Blumer, includes how meaning becomes routinized and thus dependable, predictable, but not necessarily absolute and not without possible ambiguity (p. 372). Thus, ontologically individuals, society, and objects do not exist prior to people's social relationships with one another (e.g. shared meaning) whether "actual, virtual, or imagined" (Snow 2001:369). The principles of interactive determinism and symbolization are the symbolic interactionist conceptualizations and explanations of the continuation of social structure and therefore, symbolic interactionism does not appropriately fit the characterization of a micro theory.

The strength of a symbolic interactionism is that this theoretical perspective captures how social structures are routinely formed, maintained, and transformed in

everyday life. The conceptual focus on shared meaning as dialogical and dynamic captures how people act towards things, people, and situations and how people's meanings and actions change. In short, meaning is intertwined with action and practice (Blumer [1969] 1998; Charmaz 1980, 2014; Mead 1936; Shalin 1986). Contrary to the realist notion that meaning comes from an object that makes an impression on us, symbolic interactionists view meaning as interpreted and thus as fluid and flexible. An SI perspective is useful when understanding visual artists' processes for creating artwork, which are both learned through shared meaning (such as schooling or mentorships), but also come about through artists' own playful application of novel techniques, concepts, and actions. The underpinning of SI is this dual dimension of our ability to make and modify meaning; at the same time, we are shaped into having habitual practice by way of shared meaning and through joint action. Joint action refers to the way people learn to interpret and to predict the actions of others through their social encounters.

For George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer, language is central to interactions. The symbolic interactionist standpoint understands language as a mechanism not only for symbolization but also for the process of change and "it makes possible the existence or the appearance of that situation or object... whereby that situation or object is created," (Mead [1934] 1969:78). However, contemporary postmodernists criticize symbolic interactionists conceptualization of language as a tool mainly for shared communication. Instead, theorists in the postmodernist tradition such as Ludwig Wittgenstein (1958) place language as the epistemological standpoint in order to recognize people's collective ability to create new possibilities.<sup>4</sup> Symbolic interactionists differ from this postmodernist

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<sup>4</sup> For postmodernist philosophers and theorists of the "linguistic turn" language is not an objective pointer or tool of human interaction, but instead the fundamental epistemological way that people exist in the social

standpoint because they mainly describe language as set of shared symbols. However, symbolic interactionists recognize language as the way in which people acquire the ability of self awareness within the context of socially shared meaning.

With the recognition of language, symbolic interactionism extends the shaping process of meaning as internalized within a person and experienced when a person constantly converses with him- or herself during their lived experiences. For Mead and Blumer, the premise of an internal conversation is the premise for one's ability to interact with him or herself as an object. The ability to relate to oneself through self-conscious thought represents the basis of one's self-reflexivity. For Mead ([1934] 1969), self-conscious awareness is the foundation for a distinct yet socially based selfhood. This emphasis on internal reflection provides an image of a person as actively interpretive (Blumer [1969] 1998) or self-conscious (Mead [1934] 1969) during his or her everyday experiences and social interactions.

Most studies of selfhood focus on self-reflexivity as an internal conversation (Archer 2003; Wiley 1994). The internal conversation is mostly captured by our use of language as the main means for communicating within ourselves. However, some recent studies distinguish between types of reflexivity by focusing on more hidden types of reflection. Michal Pagis's (2009) ethnographic study at Vipassana style meditation centers

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world (Lyotard 1984). Postmodernists recognize language as inseparable from people. Thus, language serves as a fundamental non-dualistic (neither objective nor subjective) epistemological assumption. Moreover, in recognizing this epistemology postmodernists understand language as capturing people's unlimited creative capacity to collectively "carve" – or create - the social world into their own making, thus providing an image of social life not as separate from what people do but instead as intimately intertwined with people's knowledge and actions. Postmodernist scholars view classic symbolic interactionists concept of language as relying on a traditional dualistic description of language as existing a priori– or as a universal given outside of human invention; and that language monologically shapes people's behavior and ideas. Thus, from a postmodernist standpoint symbolic interactionists conceptualization evokes the image that people exist as if separate from language.

emphasizes that people develop hyper-body awareness and that this awareness is distinct from discursive reflection. Discursive reflection is the internal dialogue we have with ourselves and it is expressed and experienced through our use of language. This discursive reflexivity is the process of our actual ongoing interpretations by way of meaning, language, and symbolization. Pagis emphasizes that during meditation, yoga, and dance, people come to know themselves through their bodies. Pagis (2009) refers to this type of reflexivity as embodied<sup>5</sup> self-reflexivity, in which people can experience an increase in awareness and self-monitoring through a process of feeling the body in relation to the self (p. 266).

To illustrate, Sibyl Kleiner's 2009 study of ballet dancers demonstrates that internalized structures of physical steps and body movements can occur without the dancer's internal conversation with him or herself. Kleiner describes this phenomenon as the unself-conscious actions from which the dancer then relies on motion memory, learned and internalized body movements, gestures, and steps. Psychologist Csikszentmihalyi (1997) has studied this phenomenon and refers to it as a state of flow in which a person is so absorbed in the task at hand that he or she does not rely on explicit internal dialogue to provide direction for sustained actions. Additionally, Charmaz (1980)

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<sup>5</sup> Much of the literature on people coming know the world through the physical body call this phenomenon "embodied knowledge." The term embodied is a reference to the work of phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty ([1945] 2000), who establishes a non-dualistic (neither objective nor subjective) epistemology by describing a person's relationship to knowledge and to the world as occurring with the "flesh" – or existence. The body as imagery is intended as a metaphysical grounding of knowledge as inseparable from the human beings in order to counter the "pristine" image of knowledge by objective realists. Philosophical realists describe knowledge or reason and logic as existing separate from what are considered human flaws such as emotions. The term embodied gives an image of knowledge as messy (not pristine), and so that human reason and logic "becomes" through a web of meaning intimately connected with human action. For Merleau-Ponty the metaphor of the body is not the literal learning from the physical body. Thus for sociological scholars of the body, the term embodied more accurately refers "the body (noun) and embodied (verb)" (Waskul and Van der Riet 2002:488).

points out that people are less likely to engage in inner conversation if they are in routine with familiar practices. If the meaning and/or situation is not problematic or unanticipated, and does not provide new opportunities, then a person's interpretive process lessens (Charmaz 1980; Snow 2001). I will explore these themes further in the next section.

Furthermore, Charles Cooley's ([1902] 1967) concept of the looking glass-self emphasizes that our reflective selves project images of our experiences with others, and that these images are not mirrored reproductions. Our dialogical self then can internalize images of social interactions that are imagined, interpreted, and are not exact depictions (Cooley ([1902] 1967)). This insight adds another layer of complexity to the dialogical-self such that when we reflect on ourselves in terms of our interactions this is based on what we think others expect from us, or do not, or the way we think others view us. For example, in making artwork, Howard Becker (1982) describes how artists "respond as they imagine others might respond" (p. 200). Then, from these interpretations of others' reactions to our self-image, we evaluate that meaning and possibly take action. The looking glass phenomenon points to the need for analytical distinction when studying the internalization of meaning inside of the self.

Ralph Turner (1976) and Kathy Charmaz (1991) clarify the differences between self-image, self, and self-concept. Self-image consists of fleeting reflections upon our experiences and past interactions that we recognize and interpret. These interpreted images of ourselves may not be adopted into who we think we are at the core. The self, then, is understood as a relatively steady concept of who we are, but not fully static because who we think we are can still change (Turner 1976). Charmaz (2002) contends

that our habitual actions and practices link the fluid process of self to “self” as a more constant object. Lastly, self-concept is the more stable idea people have of themselves based on organized attributes and values through which we define and identify ourselves (Turner 1976).

In addition, the classic symbolic interactionist position rests on three main premises, according to Herbert Blumer. The first premise is that people act toward things on the basis of meanings they give them (Blumer [1969] 1998:3). Secondly, Blumer asserts that the meaning of things arise out of social interactions with others (Blumer 1969:3). Third and finally, meanings are handled and modified through an interpretive process when dealing with things encountered (Blumer [1969] 1998:3). Overall, Blumer clarifies how symbolic interactionists understand meaning not as an objective referent but instead as an ongoing and dynamic process that people form and collectively change based on their actions, practices, and interpretations.

Kathy Charmaz has extended these premises of Blumer’s to a more contemporary context. First, Charmaz argues that meanings are interpreted through shared language and communication (Charmaz 1980:25). Second, the mediation of meaning in social interaction is distinguished by a continually emerging processual nature (Charmaz 1980:25). Third, the interpretative process becomes explicit when people’s meanings and/or actions become problematic, or when their situations change (Charmaz 1980; Snow 2001). Charmaz’s extension of classic SI clarifies that meaning is understood as shared language, and that language continually arises through social interaction. The third premise points out that people more actively form new meanings when they are confronted with new, unanticipated or problematic situations. This final premise provides

a critical view of why people are not always making large changes and modifications to their shared meaning. Habitual practices are significant parts of people's interactions, and involve less explicit interpretations of their everyday actions. The dual experience of habitual internalized meaning and practices, and people's more explicit interpretations is particularly useful when studying visual artists' art-making processes.

### *Habitual Practices and Emergence*

In this section I will first discuss the way we develop routinized actions and habitual meanings in our everyday lives. Second, I will explore the emergence of creativity, novelty and innovation in our actions and meanings. Although I will focus on these two broad dimensions separately, I must note that habitual practices and emergence are interrelated and lead into one another throughout people's experiences and actions. I cannot fully discuss habitual practice without relating this to our capacity toward novelty. Likewise, in the section on emergence, I will make references to habitual meanings and actions.

I will begin by addressing John Dewey's theory of actions as habits and relate this to the contemporary symbolic interactionist concept of habitual practices. Next, I will examine the role of the physical body in habitual practices, such as through gestures and body movements. Then, I will explore the concept of flow that links habitual body and/or thought processes to our immediate actions, which produces the feeling that our actions and thoughts are in sync. Lastly, I will discuss emergence in the context of pragmatists' view of novel and innovative actions. Four types of emergence I will include are un-habitual practices when countering new situations, unexpected results with newly

available materials and tools, “in the moment” development of actions and meaning, and spontaneity of actions.

### *Habits of Action*

A part of our ongoing social interactions is acquiring habits of action. John Dewey ([1922] 2012) places habits at the center of his theory of action. Habits are an interactional product of people’s encounters with social and environment situations as well as people’s own actions, which lead to a desirable result and are repeated until these actions fail (McGowan 1998). Habits do not necessarily refer to a passive activity separate from our likes or dislikes, but instead habits are acquired through our past and present activities. Habits include our interpretations or desires, which, in Dewey’s words, are our “will” ([1922] 2012). The formation of habits occurs through a person’s interactions with social life; thus, habits are not individually generated but instead are created as interactional encounters with situations (McGowan 1998). Our routines create the expectations that our situations of today are not particularly novel compared to the situations of yesterday. Habits are continual actions that lead to desired ends, such as approval, praise, and cooperation among others (McGowan 1998). Many of our actions succeed and eventually become habitual. We then establish habits within ourselves as a set of ordered actions. Thus, we do not have to always deliberately think through the ends or consequences of our behaviors and actions.

Many habits are formed through a process of learning and education. Pragmatist thinkers Dewey and Mead understand habits as socially constructed in conjunction with an active interpreting person. Mead particularly emphasizes the unit of action and organized experience as established in relation to a social self. Habits arise from a web of

interactions with other people over long periods of time. For example, Howard Becker (1982) demonstrates that artists' action and artwork come about and continue through people's collective actions and shared meaning, which Becker describes as "more or less routine" (p. 1). Contemporary symbolic interactionist David Snow (2001) refers to this routinized joint phenomenon as the principle of symbolization. Snow emphasizes that most of our daily activities occur through routinized symbolization since our day-to-day remains mostly consistent. Dewey ([1922] 2012) points out that our ordered actions (or habitual practices) form from what we actually do. Habits arise, then, from our actions in conjunction with the physical environment, social interactions, and our own active interpretations (Dewey [1922] 2012). Dewey views our behavior overall as social but he also emphasizes that our habitual actions have a "reciprocal influence" upon ourselves, upon the social environment, and upon the physical environment.

Habitual practices are an important element of Charmaz's (1991) contemporary extension of Blumer's main premises. Charmaz (1991) emphasizes that these habitual practices make-up our ordinary behavior without the necessity for explicit interpretations of our actions and interactions. Especially for adults, our ordered actions are a significant part of daily interactive processes because our lives become more routinized and we have consistent sets of experiences. Similarly, Snow (2001) points out that meaning often becomes routinized and symbolization can be taken for granted.

As pragmatists John Dewey, Hans Joas, George Herbert Mead, Charles Peirce, symbolic interactionists Kathy Charmaz and David Snow emphasize, novelty or unhabituated actions come about when people are interacting in situations in which their ordered actions or habitual practices fail. Joas (1996) concept "situated creativity"

describes how people are more likely to revise their possible strategies in relation to new and unanticipated physical or social situation that they encounter. For Joas a person engages in innovative problem solving when between habit and adjustment. Dewey ([1938] 1991) calls the reassessment of the unexpected and the subsequent alteration of one's actions as "reconstruction" (or intelligence). Similarly, Peirce (1960) refers to adjusting to a new situation as performing an "inquiry." Pragmatists stress that when people are faced with new situations, that they become more reflective upon their following actions.

Additionally, Charmaz (1991) and Snow (2001) clarify and broaden the pragmatist point. They emphasize that we engage in more explicit interpretations when we experience unexpected or challenging situations that engage us in a more active meaning-making process. A situation develops when people are "torn between conflicting desires, demands, or direction," (Charmaz 2014:271). People are more likely to change their actions when their current practices do not resolve a challenging situation (Charmaz 2014). Also, we experience more explicit interpretations in our thoughts and actions if a problem occurs that is outside our regular field of experience (Shibutani 1986:268). Snow (2001) emphasizes that we have the ability to engage in meaning modification, which he calls the principle of emergence. However, symbolization is routinely embedded in our "existing cultural and organizational contexts" (p. 371). Habits and habitual practices are understood as less interpretive ordered actions in our everyday behavior, but are subject to changes and novel engagements when we are experiencing unanticipated situations.

*Body Movements and Gestures*

Symbolic interactionism and pragmatism as perspectives emphasize action, meaning generation, and habitual practice but in these contexts the body is an understudied area. Pragmatism for the most part does not address the body in actions except for a recent theoretical emphasis by Hans Joas (1996). Nonetheless, the body is a growing area of interest in sociology. However, many studies investigate what is done to the body. In contrast, symbolic interactionist studies of the body distinguish the body as both subject and object (Waskul and Vannini 2006). In SI studies of the body mainly examine the body as based in narratives (Charmaz 1991, 1995, 2002; Denzin 2003; Edgley 2006; Westfall 2006), performances (Atkison [1998] 2006; Cahill 2006; Gardner and Gronfein 2006; Stephens and Delamont 2006), and images of self (Charmaz and Rosenfield 2006; Crossley [2001] 2006; Schrock and Boyd 2006). Still, some studies in SI examine the body as the source of knowledge, meaning, and signification (Brandt 2006; Huggins 2006; Kotarna and Held 2006)

For this dissertation the body is recognized as the direct action of “doing” from which actions of the body are understood as a sources for learning and generating knowledge in social contexts. The investigation of what the body does is meaningful for understanding habits and meaning making as action. Wolff-Michael Roth (2001) highlights that the relationship between gestures and social learning is an understudied area of research that has significant indications for our ability to interact and modify meaning and knowledge. Michael Pagis (2009) stresses that learning through the body modifies our thoughts, habits, and concept of self. Christopher Small’s (1999) study of performance musicians demonstrates the importance of gestures and body movements as

mediating social interactions. Understanding experiential knowledge as also occurring through actions of the body allows researchers to recognize the interrelationship between socially shaped movements and thought (Shilling 1993; Featherstone and Turner 1995).

Recent literature and specific empirical studies have explored the role of the body in social learning (Goldin-Meadow 1993, 1997, 1999; Kendon 1997; Kim et al. 2010; O’Conner 2005; Pagis 2009; Small 1999). These studies suggest that another way people learn and experience is through physical body movements, such as physical gestures. Body movements as experiential knowledge can generate habitual practices in activities such as dance, meditation, sports, art, studying mathematics, and others. Habitual body movements in empirical research are found to have social contexts to them (Featherstone and Turner 1995; Shilling 1993; Waskul and Vannini 2006). For example, gestures are a human feature that enable knowing, learning, and communication with others (Kendon 1997; Piaget 1959). Gestures are a way for people to engage with the world and in social interaction. Embodied gestures represent people’s ability to acquire experiential knowledge through the physical body (Pagis 2009). The practices and habits experienced through the physical body and through gestures can influence how and what we come to know in both our practices and thinking. Pagis (2009) describes this as a heightened body awareness from which reflexive dispositions are developed within the person.

A video study found that students learn principles of geometry through gestures and body movements (Kim et al. 2010). These gestures are a way for the children to interact with, express, and gain knowledge about the topic. The researchers concluded that the children thought through and learned mathematical principles by moving their bodies. For example, students made the shape of a sphere with both of their hands to

represent a circle, and in another instance, they placed their hands one over the other several times to answer their teacher's question, "What is stacking?" (Kim et al. 2010:208). Susan Goldin-Meadow and colleagues (1993, 1997, 1999) in a series of experiments with children learning mathematics through gestures found that the students' gestures (1) revealed knowledge not expressed in speech; (2) showed implicit and emergent knowledge; (3) found that mismatches between gestures indicated a readiness to learn, and (4) modified their gesture-speech relationship to reflect changes in their knowledge. These consistent findings demonstrate the ways that even small body movements contribute to experiential knowledge.

Furthermore, Erin O'Connor's (2005) ethnography of glassblowing demonstrates the significance of previous body habit and body knowledge. O'Connor analyzes finding she refers to as "bodily intentionality," meaning the alignment of body movement in harmony with the desired technique as a means of gaining practical knowledge about a craft. O'Connor emphasizes that the art of glassblowing is learned by doing and practicing through the physical body, and less by thinking about the craft.

For the novice, her lived experience is likely to be informed, not from a lived practice of meaning of the particular technique as it serves the whole, but rather from other areas of her life, with which she can handle the newly encountered situation. Her adaptation is not conscious; it happens at the level of the body. Her body 'catches' already-known components of glassblowing, like heat and retrieval, and with some adjustments handles and gets through the new situation with greater or lesser degrees of success (O'Connor 2005:191).

Even in the beginning stages of learning the craft, the artist's knowledge from the body orients his or her actions. Achieving a habitual practice of doing comes from going through the process repeatedly, thus moving an artist towards higher levels of proficiency (O'Connor 2005:191). However, for an artist to master glassblowing, O'Connor finds

that this means transcending the formation of practical knowledge (habit) to incorporate the dispositions of the craft in order to solve ongoing problems in the process. The term *dispositions* refers to applying previously acquired knowledge during the artistic process in order to anticipate and navigate the use of techniques and understanding the possible effect on the material or glass.

Research that explores body movements as sources of knowledge demonstrates experiential knowledge with the physical body. The examples of learning geometry and mathematics through gestures and mastering glassblowing through body movements show not only that these experiences influence what the participants think, but also that this process can occur again and again until applied in a habitual sense. Another form of this intersection of moving learned habits and body movements is the psychological concept of flow.

### *Flow*

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1997) finds that a state of flow, akin to athletes' descriptions of being "in the zone," can occur for people when they are deeply immersed in their task at hand. Numerous empirical studies have found that athletes and dancers master movements, gestures, and performance with their bodies through training overtime, and many can engage in these movements without constantly thinking and conversing within themselves during their performances. These performers are "in the moment" and they move from habitual practices of the body in a seemingly automatic way, without the need for self-conscious thought and direction. At the same time, these performers feel focused, in control, and very confident in their actions during their activity (Nideffer 2002). Moreover, while in flow states, the athletes' or dancers'

perceptions of time are also altered or distorted; they either lose track of time or feel that time is passing by very slowly. Furthermore, performers report a feeling of pleasure while unselfconsciously absorbed in their actions. Some psychologists refer to this state as the optimal integration of mental and physical processes that may result in superior performances (Nideffer 2002). Ballet dancers (Kleiner 2009), exotic dancers (Barton and Hardesty 2010), amateur professional boxers (Wacquant 1996, 2004), elite athletes (Mahoney and Avenier 1977; Mahoney et al. 1987; Garfield and Bennett 1984; Jackson 1992, 1996), college athletes (Chavez 2008), and golfers (Cohen 1991) have all described performing with their bodies as if from habitual gestures without explicit self-consciousness while immersed in these various activities.

Kleiner (2009) particularly demonstrates that ballet dancers' flow moments, which she describes as a lessening of self-consciousness, are rooted in previous physical practices such as steps and body movements. The dancers practice and repeat ballet gestures and motions over and over again, from which they internalize the movements within themselves. Dancers can call upon these habits or habitual practices without relying on their internal dialogue. Also, Kleiner finds that flow states during performances are described as pleasurable for the dancer. Moreover, the lessening of self-consciousness for the dancers adds to the aesthetic dimension of their performance. Kleiner concludes that body movements for the dancers are structured dimensions that do not always need discursive reflection.

Janet Banfield and Mark Burgess (2013) study of visual artists' experiences with flow found that two-dimensional artists such as painters and three-dimensional artists such as sculptors share similarities and differences. Two-dimensional artists consistently

describe flow as intense enjoyment, and deep immersion, which occurs during a balance of challenges and their skills similar to Csikszentmihalyi (1997) theory of flow (Banfield and Burgess 2013). However, three-dimensional artists described experiences of flow less often. Two and three-dimensional visual artists show that flow states are un-sustainable over long period of time in contrast to flow for dancers and athletes. The limits of physical body movements during art practices make flow state less sustainable for visual artists. Still, when in flow moments artists describe their body as emerging in control of their actions from which they sometimes derive new meaning. Overall, artists identified flow as important to their artistic process (Banfield and Burgess 2013).

Flow states are shown to occur not only during primarily physical performances but also in situations that require primarily mental performances. Since flow is primarily the feeling of “being at one” with what a person is doing, this feeling occurs in activities about which people have substantial knowledge, experiences, and confidence. Canadian chess players (Puddephatt 2003), improvisational jazz musicians (Seddon 2005), piano players (Chaffin and Imreh 2002), musicians (Custodero 2005; MacDonald et al. 2006), music teachers and music students (Bakker 2005; Custodero 2002), second language learners (Egbert 2004), and workers (Csikszentmihalyi and LaFevre 1989) have all described flow states while absorbed in these various pastimes. The findings of these studies indicate that people also get lost in their immediate activity while immersed in their actions. However, absorption in the moment falls along a challenge-skill balance in which flow is more likely experienced if the task is neither too easy nor too hard. Thus, even in terms of primarily mental performances, the person’s habitual experience, knowledge, and skills have significant roles in immersion states.

### *Emergence*

The concept of emergence is rooted in pragmatist thought and utilized by symbolic interactionists. The principle of emergence describes the non-habitual aspects of social life, such as our ability for dynamic meaning making (Snow 2001). Despite our tendency toward habitual actions, we continually do unexpected and unpredictable things that impact our routines and alter our circumstances or goals (McGowan 1998). Novelty is a dimension of social life that provides insight into how our actions emerge and change. Also, by exploring this phenomenon, sociologists are reminded that people are not determined by their routines, thus enabling a more authentic image of a person as actively engaged in constructing his or her life, thoughts and actions (Wrong 1961). For this section I will cover themes of emergence as un-habitual practices when encountering new situations such as in problem solving and exploration, unexpected results with newly available materials and tools, “in the moment” development of actions and meaning, and spontaneity of actions. However, first I will briefly address major perspectives on creativity and why I emphasize a focus on novelty and innovation.

In traditional psychology, creativity is usually understood as an attribute or a characteristic of an individual. Traditionally, creativity is treated as form of self-expression or self-actualization (Maslow 1974). This highly individualistic approach to novelty ignores both the social and material environment in which creative actors are embedded, as Csikszentmihalyi (1996) points out creativity exists within a social context. More social approaches to innovation focus on collective social influences, social support and mentorship, social networks, acceptance and usefulness of creative actions or products, and effects of creative artifacts on society (Cromptley 2006). Howard Becker’s

(1982) work, *Art Worlds*, describes the art process as mainly consisting of collective actions based on artistic conventions and collaborations. Becker (1982) writes, “all artistic work, like all human activity, involves the joint activity of a number, often a large number, of people” (p.1). From this, Becker illuminates the way in which “doing art” becomes conventional through collective actions.

For Becker (1982), convention emerges from collective interaction with some tools and raw materials, as well as from the ways that artists consume cultural texts. Cultural texts refer to “a point of reference for people engaged in products of interaction” (Becker 1986:19). These conventions limit artists’ choices even before they start making choices. Customary practices also increase efficiency of cultural production, and establish a set of values and rewards. Overall, conventions shape the social and material space for artists and are the basis for what Becker (1982) calls “art worlds.”

To illustrate, Frederick Seddon (2005) found that during improvised jazz sessions, musicians collaborated to create music in an uncertain situation by communicating with each other. They provided instructions to one another through non-verbal gestures like eye contact and body cues. Seddon identified that in their performance they were constrained by shared knowledge bases such as the 32-bar-cycles of jazz and characteristic rhythmic patterns. However, the performers listened to one another, responded, and interacted with their own music elaborations, thus collaborating in a creative “in the moment” performance. Hence, improvisations of jazz musicians rely on both their familiar conventional knowledge and habitual skills, as well as originality when interacting with other musicians.

Creativity as a theoretical concept is typically understood as the social responses to artifacts such as art and music (Edmonds and Candy 2002). The conceptualization of creativity as social response overlooks artists' actions, situations, and relationship with material and ideas. Alternatively, the concepts novelty and innovation capture artists' engagement in new tools and discursive challenges when seeking new forms of expression in their cultural productions. Also, in the example of the jazz musicians, innovation includes "in the moment" constructed actions and meaning. A certain art world only remains "for a while" (Becker 2007:7) because art worlds are shaped by changes made by the artists. Pragmatist concepts of novelty and innovation provide insight for changes in art worlds by focusing on materials and tools challenges in the process of making, and unexpected encounters and spontaneity.

For this dissertation, novelty is explored as a process in which people view innovation as emergent from their actions. Christopher Small's (1999) study of musicians emphasized the need to put action back into understanding art, so that art is not reified as a static object. Exploring how visual artists "do things with their artwork," is distinct from viewing their actions as occurring against material objects as backdrops to their actions; and compels an understanding of novelty as experiential. As Sutherland and Acord (2007) point out, "art is good to think with" (p.126). For investigating daily actions and meaning-making processes of individual artists, a pragmatist approach to action, emergence, and situated knowledge is an appropriate approach to exploring novelty.

Emergence is originally a concept associated with George Herbert Mead. Mead (1938) emphasizes that the novel and emergent conditions of people's actions more often

occur during problematic situations in which they find themselves. Locating novelty in unexpected situations is an early pragmatist concept shared by John Dewey and Charles Peirce. For Dewey ([1938] 1991), people “reconstruct” their actions or meaning in response to encountered obstacles. For Peirce (1960), people act and respond to a situation by naming it or giving it meaning. In Peirce’s phrasing, people make “judgments” or interpretations about the situation in which they find themselves. Contemporary pragmatist Han Joas (1996) calls novel action “situated creativity” which means people’s revision to their possible strategies and actions occurs in relation to demands of new situations. The failure of a habitual practice, then, is the source of both change and of the emergence of something new (Dewey ([1938] 1991). The pragmatist orientation around the act allows for the capturing of the moment of innovation as unpredictable and as an emergent event (Puddephatt 2005). Two different pragmatist ideas then give insights into our unhabituated actions.

For Peirce (1960), once a person encounters an unknown situation, he or she must first form a judgment. A judgment means the absorption of information of a situation and the naming of it, essentially the process of interpreting or give meaning. Peirce is influenced by the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and views the process of forming judgments as linguistic, conceptual and categorical. Thus, when met with unexpected situations, people apply a process of considering similarities, trying to identify and generalize based on what they know. People then take action because they deem the situation to be of a certain kind. For Peirce, the novelty of the situation is then lessened by this judgment. Judgments are neither singular nor necessarily correct, but instead are a process of experimentation and trial and error. Then, after the action is taken, we resolve

our judgments in relation to the results of those actions. Consequently, judgments provide feedback for our experiences resulting in possibly new actions.

Peirce's concept of judgments resulting in novel action sees an interpretive actor as mediating the unexpected situation when applying new meaning. Both Dewey and Peirce focus on our ability to read and judge situations, rather than on reducing a person to only external influences or to purely internalized socialized expectations (McGowan 1998). Similarly, for the Merleau-Ponty tradition, a person's self-consciousness is maximized when experiencing unexpected circumstances (Charmaz 1981; Puddephatt 2005; Snow 2001). To illustrate, a study by Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (1976) shows that fine art students who show greater originality in their artwork view art as an ongoing problem solving process. Problem solving is the practice of experiencing and interacting with unexpected and challenging situations. By treating their process as a problem to be solved, artists must reinterpret their ideas and actions to find innovative solutions in their artwork.

Another way to look at the process of emergence is as explorations. In Edmond and Candy's (2002) study of graphic designers they describe exploration as (1) breaking from convention (2) total immersion in an activity (3) problem-solving and (4) parallel channels, meaning using several different approaches and viewpoints at the same time (p. 92). These findings for exploration demonstrate that novelty occur in several ways throughout artist's practices, such as the by problem-solving, or using parallel channels. The use of problem solving and parallel channels is consistent with pragmatist interpretation of novelty as occurring in response to unexpected situations. However, the finding of total immersion is similar to the concept of flow. During flow states novel

actions can occur (Banfield and Burgess 2013). And lastly, breaking from convention can occur through either intentional or accident interruptions of habits of practice.

For Mead (1932, [1934] 1969, 1938), the interpretive actor has several contexts from which to accomplish novel or original actions. Aaron Puddephatt (2005) interprets various theoretical concepts of Mead into an organized theory of novelty. Mainly, for Mead novelty can occur “in the moment” (Mead 1932, 1938), through unexpected encounters such as with material and object (Mead [1934] 1969) which Puddephatt (2005) extends to include tools, and the unpredictable character of our actions or spontaneity (Mead [1934] 1969). Puddephatt organizes Mead’s ideas around the central importance of temporality. For Mead (1932), temporality refers to the “here and now,” or to the present moment in which we act. Our experiences are rooted in the present act (Mead 1938).

Puddephatt (2005) describes Mead’s concept of meaning generation as first rooted in temporality and then falling across three fields of interaction: the reflexive and interpretive person, social interactions with others, and the material environment. We can take ourselves as objects through internal conversation. We engage in joint action and shared meaning through actions and experiences with others. And, we can take the role of material objects with which we interact. Both Joas (1996) and Puddephatt emphasize that Mead’s thought includes ongoing interactions with physical objects and the physical environment.<sup>6</sup> Thus, we generate systems of meaning around our interplay with physical objects and materials. This recognition is important when considering the ways in which

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<sup>6</sup> Which is why George Herbert Mead is referred to as both a pragmatist and a symbolic interactionist.

we manipulate and create meaning for objects, such as in technological developments or in artwork (Puddephatt 2005).

Additionally, Mead's (1938) concept of emergence describes the unexpected in the perceptual act. Mead's emphasis on temporality requires novelty for handling unexpected situations in the here and now. Mead locates spontaneity outside of our reflective awareness in our direct actions without self-conscious reflection (Puddephatt 2005). This focus differs from Peirce (1960), who emphasizes the importance of interpretive judgments. However, Mead also recognizes that even the reflective calculations in our thoughts have an unpredictable character in our actions. Emergence is ever-present and emergent novelty allows for the continuity of experience (Cronk 1987). Overall, Mead's concept of emergence is useful for exploring artists' relationship to materials, processes, and the possibilities of unexpected results in their artwork.

Emergence is connected with familiar knowledge, shared meaning by way of conventional knowledge, and collective actions such as in Howard Becker's examples of art worlds. However, pragmatists locate emergence as occurring with newly available tools and materials, discursive challenges or the application of new interpretations in unexpected situations such as problem solving and exploration, "in the moment" constructions of actions and meaning, and unexpected results of actions. These forms of emergence capture the process of novel actions from a social perspective.

In summary, in this chapter I discussed the major theoretical insights and empirical research that influence the research questions, interview data, and analytical findings for this dissertation project. First, I address pragmatists' underpinnings of symbolic interactionism, which provide a dynamic means of understanding people as

socially constructing knowledge, shared meaning, and habits of actions. I highlight concepts of symbolic interactionism - mainly the active interpretive self, the role of language and symbolization in social interactions, our internal conversations by way of language, and the looking glass self. Next, I described six premises of SI by Herbert Blumer and Kathy Charmaz, and I drew attention to the dual dimension of habitual or routinized practices and dynamic meaning making. I further explored habitual practices in the context of John Dewey's concept of habit of action. I also pointed out recent literature that draws attention to the physical body in the process of habits and meaning making by way of movements, gestures, and more. Then, I included Csikzentmihalyi's (1997) concept of flow, which describes the highly developed habits of the body and the mind as in sync with actions resulting in a lessening of the person's internal reflective conversation while in the moment of engrossment in the activity at hand. Next, I explored novelty and innovation in our actions. Although creativity is traditionally viewed as an individualistic attribute, I take a social approach to the process of constructing actions and meaning. I used the pragmatist perspective of emergence and other themes related to meaning generation: newly available tools and materials, applying new interpretations in unexpected situations such as problem-solving and exploration, "in the moment" constructions of actions and meaning, and unexpected results of actions as spontaneity to understand the ways in which creativity, novelty, and originality emerge in a social context.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

Chapter Three addresses the methodological approach to this dissertation project.

The specific guiding research questions are:

1. What are visual artists' experiences with their art-making processes when coming up with an idea, planning a project, and creating the actual piece?
2. How do artists experience and give meaning to novelty in their actions?
3. How do the aspects of the artist's environment, and the availability of materials and tools, shape their artwork in unexpected ways?

With these research questions I investigated visual artists experiences with their everyday practices. The purpose of this project was to explore how people made meaning with their actions and practices when creating original visual artwork. I explored unique insights and possibilities for patterned social behaviors when artists engaged in their artistic process. This dissertation is an extension and elaboration of a project begun in a Social Psychology seminar. I started this line of questioning in relation to theories of symbolic interactionist conceptualization of discursive thought, in which I originally wanted to explore the possibility of multiple ways to experience self-reflexivity. To investigate these research questions, I used a qualitative approach. This research design is appropriate because for understanding the ways artists in the sample construct and view their experiences, thoughts, and actions (Blumer [1969] 1998), it is a better fit than a quantitative method, which aims to measure relationships and predict behavior. The specific qualitative approach used is grounded theory methodology, which includes direct data collection and simultaneous analysis (Charmaz 2014; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1998). For this dissertation project, grounded theory is an applicable

approach because it was originally developed to study fluid and emergent social processes (Glaser and Strauss 1967), and this project explores the social context and experiences of artists work. Moreover, in using grounded theory a researcher recognizes their own insights as central to the study (Charmaz 2014).

The main objective of grounded theory is to generate new theories from data (Glaser and Strauss 1967), which is an inductive approach to research. Also, concurrent data collection and analysis differentiates grounded theory from other research designs (Glaser and Strauss 1967). For example, quantitative researchers generate data in order to test a hypothesis. Grounded theory constitutes a methodology because GT includes both a philosophical position about society (which informs the research design) and methodological practices (Birks and Mills 2011). Over time, grounded theory researchers developed various philosophical traditions that range from objectivist to constructivist positions, such that this methodology includes a range of various assumptions and practices (Kenny and Fourie 2014).

### *Philosophical Assumptions*

The epistemological assumption, or theory of knowledge, used in the application of grounded theory methodology for this project comes from a constructivist standpoint. Constructivist researchers acknowledge that they cannot be fully impartial observers, and thus they have an interpretive influence over their analysis (Charmaz 1995; Charmaz 2014; Kenny and Fourie 2014; Holstein and Gubrium 2005). A constructivist grounded theory researcher presents his or her interactions in the data analysis process and thus his or her findings as “co-constructions” with the interviewees. This presentation of findings is unlike an objectivist grounded theorist, who neutrally “discovers” emergent theories

through a seemingly un-biased process achieved by procedural data analysis techniques. An objectivist's ontological realist stance relies on dualism, meaning the mind is assumed to accurately and precisely reflect knowledge about the studied social situation without inference from our interpretations. Rather, a constructivist standpoint challenges an assumption of dualism by pointing out that the researcher does not cleanly separate him- or herself from his or her analysis. Constructivists recognize that theories do not emerge from an abstract and supposedly neutral social context; instead, a researcher must identify and organize these patterns, which is an active process of the mind, as well as relate the significance of his or her findings.

#### *Constructivist Grounded Theory*

Kathy Charmaz (1995) clarifies that a constructivist grounded theorists' epistemology assumes that the researcher interprets theoretical categories, however the researcher also maintains rigorous and methodical analytical practices. Researchers should acknowledge their influence to the overall study while being sure to apply systematic analytical techniques by remain close to the interview data (Charmaz 2014). Constructivist grounded theorists are concerned with their relationships to participants, and their own influence when developing the findings and final text and findings. Moreover, the researcher applies an epistemological understanding that his or her knowledge is inseparable from and subsequently is important to the analysis. Constructivist grounded theorists apply a social ontology, or the image of the social world, as made up of meaning-making processes, and meaning is tied to people's practices and actions which follows the premises of symbolic interactionism and pragmatism (Charmaz 2014:271). Thus, a constructivist application of grounded theory

is fitting for the dissertation project both epistemologically and ontologically because the research questions are centrally focused on the ways artists create meaning when making artwork. Symbolic interactionism and grounded theory are a theory and methods package, because of the compatibility of underlying philosophical principles and methodological practices (Charmaz 2008; Clarke 2005, 2006).

As a research practice, my inquiries and interpretations were important to the analytical process. For example, during early interviews, I recognized a similar description of a certain experience that I subsequently explored by pushing the questioning further, and I came to interpret it as a process of immersion similar to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1997) concept called flow. This example shows in small part how I also constructed the analytical results in conjunction with the data. Charmaz (2014) states that by merely asking a research question, a researcher brings an “analytical edge” to the process of data collection (p. 94).

Constructionists assume knowledge is co-created by both participants and the researcher. Thus, knowledge and facts do not emerge from refined methods and techniques, but rather from a process of construction and interpretation. From this stance, the researcher acknowledges that the process of his or her analysis is akin to social interaction. Knowledge is then understood not as universal, but instead as constructed meanings in a particular context. Thus, the researcher takes a reflexive position, in which they “stand inside their research,” (Charmaz 2014:320); this is in contrast to an objectivist researcher’s approach, which assumes that the researcher is separate from the data and from the process of analysis. Objectivist grounded theory relies on a value-free approach to knowledge where the researcher is considered neutral in the research process,

so objective themes and patterns emerge from the data (Charmaz 2014; Kenny and Fourie 2014). For an objectivist approach, the researcher practices specific techniques that maintain value-neutrality. Both an objectivist and a constructivist approach are within the grounded theory traditions. The researcher I use the constructivist approach and emphasize that the findings are methodical, rigorous, and structured constructs and interpretations that remain close to meaning and language expressed by the participants.

#### *Grounded Theory Research Methods*

For practices of grounded theory, a researcher applies a more flexible approach to data collection and analysis. This type of research design starts with conducting several preliminary and exploratory in-depth interviews and constantly comparing the analysis through the practice of initial codes. Grounded theory is characterized by both open-ended strategies and more systematic analysis of the material (Charmaz and Belgrave 2012). In-depth interviews are an appropriate approach to data collection because the researcher conducts these interviews in a flexible, open-ended way, and researchers ask interviewees to detail an aspect of life about which they have insight and experience (Charmaz and Belgrave 2012:347). Also, in-depth interview researchers conduct direct data collection, through which they maintain close interaction with and management of the data process. Hence, the method of in-depth interviewing, like grounded theory, is a process that enables both flexibility and control. Overall, the collection of rich data is essential to a grounded theory methodology because direct data serve as the foundation for constructing meaningful and robust theories (Charmaz and Belgrave 2012:348).

An initial analysis in GT consists of the researcher categorizing the data by identifying important words or phrases and labeling them (Birks and Mills 2011). A

grounded theory approach then uses theoretical sampling instead of a fixed sample size. Theoretical samples are data sample selections that come from a researchers' identification of the most appropriate participants to answer the research questions or for further investigation of patterns found in the data. Grounded theory theoretical sampling involves conducting more interviews either by returning to previously interviewed participants or new interviewees, until analyzed categories are thoroughly saturated (Charmaz 2014). Categories are the conceptual relationships between codes. Saturation refers to the point at which new data fits into already constructed codes with corresponding theoretical categories rather than suggesting new ones, while these categories explain the social phenomenon sufficiently in terms of properties and dimensions (Birks and Mills 2011).

Additionally, theoretical sampling provides access to stories that can shed insight on formed theoretical categories. With these research practices, researchers can develop and change guiding research questions, and can later form additional ones as data collection and analysis continue. Additional and refined research questions then begin another stage of theoretical sampling and subsequent analysis. Lastly, the process of drawing overall connections, or theoretical themes, between emergent categories puts the analysis back together by presenting a complete integration of the research.

Grounded theory as a methodology relies on inductive reasoning, and this process is iterative rather than linear. The GT process includes inquiry, data, and active coding as a type of analysis. Together, these elements of research capture the way a researcher interprets significant patterns and themes, which is a strategy for moving the data toward more theoretical conceptualizations. Ground theory is a variation of an inductive

approach because the processes of data collections and analysis are done concurrently. The reason for going back and forth between the data and analysis is to keep the observations and the analysis more closely related, and to maintain an intimate link between data and findings (Charmaz 2014). A grounded theory methodology also recognizes the role of the researcher in making analytical connections and the researcher's role in pursuing those themes by conducting more interviews, (this is called theoretical sampling).

A grounded theory process involves an open-ended theoretical perspective that occurs with data collection (Charmaz 2014). For this dissertation, as a general orientation, the researcher used classic symbolic interactionist theories and concepts to shape the research questions; however, through subsequent data collection and analysis, the researcher explored and interpreted new theoretical insights. Specific analytical perspectives that I apply include classic and contemporary symbolic interactionism, pragmatism, John Dewey's theory of habits, sociology of the body and embodiment, and Mihaly Csikzentmihalyi's concept of flow, the sociology of art, and pragmatist's and symbolic interactionists concept of emergence. These theoretical influences are used in a fluid and interactive way when interpreting the data, and are not used as theoretical categories to test.

The meaning that visual artists give to how and why they make their action when creating artwork in particular contexts is the key concern of this dissertation project. Grounded theory methodology is appropriate for this study because the central concern is to explore how artists construct their actions and meanings in their experiential contexts. The overall point of interest for this project is analysis of how artists create their actions

and construct meaning when making visual artwork. Furthermore, this project also addresses how artists include novelty in their actions, and it addresses the unexpected creations of action in the context of available materials.

*Institutional Review Board*

This project was eligible for expedited review because of the low risk to participants for their inclusion in this social science research. The Principal Faculty Investigator was Dr. Linda L. Belgrave, and the sole student investigator and interviewer was Christina Sanchez Volatier (Weston). The protocol was submitted as part of a project for a graduate seminar, but with the expectation of extending the study beyond the class requirements. The Review Board requested minor changes and correction were submitted. The protocol was approved on November 4, 2012.

In line with human subject research requirements and code of ethics each participant was asked for his or her informed consent to be interviewed, recorded, and for his or her interview to be transcribed. Each participant gave his or her verbal consent before the start of the interview. Verbal consent was appropriate because of the minimal risk to the participants in this study. Participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary; that they may refuse to answer any questions, and that they were welcome to voice any questions or concerns. A copy of informed consent form can be found in Appendix A. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant in order to maintain confidentiality for interviewees. A key that linked the participants to their pseudonyms was kept in a separate digital password protected folder, and the folder was only accessible by the investigators. Data files, both audio and typed transcriptions, were kept on a password-protected computer.

*Interview Data*

Following IRB approval at the University of Miami, I conducted semi-structured and in-depth interviews with 20 visual artists in the South Florida area (n=20) and three follow-up interviews. The strategy for the interviews involved developing a guide for asking visual artists about their actions, thoughts, and influences when making artwork. I included questions about background information, their interest in art, their experiences, their thoughts on creativity, and the meaning of art for them. The goal of these inquiries was to learn how they came up with an idea and followed it through in their practices, and what this process meant to them. During the short follow-ups I further probed artists experiences with available tools, materials, and techniques. Overall, I conducted interviews as “guided conversations” as suggested by Kathy Charmaz (2014). A copy of the interview guide can be found in Appendix B.

As issues of interest arose, I would explore them further in the current interview, as well as make a note afterwards and pursue this new line of questioning in subsequent interviews. I used field notes after interviews and wrote down my own reactions and general impressions about the conversation. Some interviews brought up more new information and lines of inquiry than others. Around the 17th interview, I began to hear very similar accounts with less significant new information. I felt they had reached a point of sampling saturation by 20 interviews, a point which is within the acceptable range for grounded theory methodology (Creswell 2006). However, after initial coding I developed an additional research question, and I proposed further theoretical sampling by conducting three follow-up interviews.

I conducted all of the 20 interviews and follow-ups face-to-face and digitally recorded them. Face-to-face interviews took place in the artists' studios or at public food and coffee establishments throughout the Miami and Ft. Lauderdale areas. The interviews ranged from 35 minutes to 1 hour and 45 minutes long; the average interview time was 60 minutes. Either a professional transcriber or I transcribed each interview. The transcripts yielded 174 single space typed pages.

I purposively recruited professional artists for this study because their art-making is a primary activity for them. The artists' vast experience, knowledge, and current immersion in art-making enabled rich data collection for investigating the guiding research questions. All of the artists interviewed were currently working as professionals, and had been for anywhere from 6-30 years. These participants are considered professionals because their financial livelihoods come from producing artwork. They are referred to as visual artists because the main intention for their artwork is for it to be viewed publicly. The researcher personally knew three of the twenty artists.

Originally, I intended to focus on painters and muralists, but everyone except the sculptor had had experience painting and then some over time changed their practices by adding or switching to other types of materials. As the interviews progressed, I realized that the artists maintained important similarities even when using a variety of diverse materials, and the differences in materials highlighted boundaries to their practices. Overwhelmingly the artists described how the most significant differences when creating occurred when creating digital artwork on a computer instead of creating with physical materials.

To recruit the artists in the South Florida area, I used recommendations from four different sources, which yielded anywhere from one to two participants each. Also, I used snowball sampling, meaning that some of the artists recommended one to two colleagues, who were later interviewed. I also contacted six interviewees through four different websites. Two of these websites were self-promotion sites used by the artists, and the other two are public group sites that listed and described many artists in the South Florida area. The variety of sources gave a sample of artists from the four major studio areas in Miami and Fort Lauderdale, as well as several outside those main areas. I contacted all of the participants initially through email, and then sometimes communicate with them by phone. Nearly everyone asked to participate became an interviewee.

#### *Discussion of Making Art*

As the researcher I do not have membership in the South Florida art community, and I am not involved in the South Florida art scene. I learned a lot talking with the artists, who, in my opinion, spoke openly and eagerly. I have dabbled in visual art techniques by taking formal classes in drawing, painting, and photography over the past ten years. I do not identify myself as an artist, but I do enjoy trying and learning about visual art activities as a general hobby. This basic knowledge allowed me to ask about techniques and probe artists' descriptions further. However, the limits of my knowledge also enabled me to ask for more clarification and explanation of unfamiliar practices. Overall, most of the artists told me they enjoyed reflecting upon and discussing their artistic processes.

### *Data Analysis*

In maintaining a grounded theory emphasis, my interpretivist analysis was concurrent with interviewing (Charmaz 2014). After the first four interviews, I did initial coding of the typed transcripts. For this I coded line by line. I provided short names or labels to summarize sections of description in the data. The initial coding consisted of systematic practices of naming, labeling, and interpreting patterns in the interview data. As a grounded theorist I stayed close to the language used by the participants when developing these codes. As transcripts became available I did initial coding by examining the use of language by participants because language signifies meaning and context for the interviewees. I built upon these codes as each transcribed interview became available.

Next I conducted focused coding. According to Charmaz (2014) coding includes two stages: naming, and then the focused and “selective phrasing” of the most significant phenomenon. The first stage, initial coding, is the practice of sorting the data. The second involves the practices of synthesis and organization. Focused coding is the process of making phenomena more explicit by conceptualizing people’s experiences (Charmaz 2014:140). Overall, this practice is a way for the researcher to organize patterns in the data.

Taking a constructivist approach, I developed patterns from the codes by interpreting what was significant in the context of the interviews. I used the method of constantly comparing codes between data files. I compared codes between transcripts then I would modify, expand, or collapse various labels of constructed codes. At this point of grappling with the data I also included observations and reflection from the field. Field notes were taken after interviews in which I wrote down impressions of what

seemed most interesting and meaningful from the artists' descriptions. Field notes yield 10 typed pages. Field notes serve as a way for the researcher to take record of their impression of what stood out as most significant from artist's descriptions. I then constructed focused codes by categorizing, labeling, and organizing initial codes and taking into account further information from the researcher's field notes.

From the focused codes I further identify patterns in the data by making connections to conceptual categories. I started to link codes identified as being related, or that had a conceptual relationship. By drawing on broader similarities between certain focused codes I began to form early categories. Then I started memo writing to capture their reasoning for establishing the connection between groups of codes into categories and their significance.

Memos are written records of a researcher's thought process throughout the study (Birks and Mills 2011). Overall, a researcher's memos further integrate and organize the codes he or she has interpreted. Charmaz (2014) refers to creating memos as an analytical process in which researchers make sense of the data by elaborating on their focused codes. Memos consist of loosely written free writes with analytical statements and the researcher's experience grappling with the data (Charmaz and Belgrave 2012:357). Memos are also a way to keep the researcher's original interpretation of the data close to what the interviewees describe, especially once the researcher begins to compare codes to previous literature and existing theories.

In general, with the written memos, I tried to understand the commonalities and differences the artists described; I especially focused on the language participants used when describing their actions. I continuously wrote memos as the researcher formed

categories from the data. I wrote what the categories meant, how and why they included various identified codes, and how the categories were either related or unrelated to other phenomenon in the data. Also, I used memos to recognize aspects of the data and analysis that were incomplete. This research method is an example of theoretical sampling. Since data collection and analysis were done together I guided the following interviews based on the preliminary findings from an earlier analysis in order to saturate constructed categories. I asked more questions, and had participants expand on certain lines of questioning that addressed nascent categories.

The last stage of memo writing involved linking developed categories to previous literature and previous empirical work in order to move codes toward major theoretical themes. The goal of GT analysis is theory construction, developed from the experience of the participants. Theoretical themes are conceptual, abstract, and analytical ways to explain data. Ultimately, theory construction is accomplished by moving the findings towards more abstract themes that convey deeper relevance and significance. With GT analysis constructed theory does not convey a universally representative explanation of the social phenomenon but instead captures the most significant meanings within a particular context. For this project, this means that the constructed theory encapsulates the important patterns of experiences for visual artists in the South Florida area.

In the process of constructing theoretical themes I compared other scholarly literature and the formed codes and written memos, in order to sift out possible similarities, differences, and broader significances. A constructivist analytical practice uses both inductive and abductive logic (drawing on one's existing knowledge) as part of the GT researcher's process of moving the data forward (Charmaz 2014; Birks and Mills

2001). Thus, I drew from my own knowledge about social psychology and sociological theory in analyzing major themes. By writing “advanced memos” (Charmaz 2014) I organized codes and categories to develop theoretically relevant themes. Glaser (1978) states that after coding, theoretical themes are a way to “weave a fractured story back together” (p. 72). I constructed the substantive grounded theory while remaining close to the patterns that artists’ described about their experience.

Moreover, I visually integrated codes, categories, and emergent themes as a way to more deeply understand the analytical findings constructed from the data. For this I went through several drafts of diagrams. Charmaz and Belgrave (2012) recommend sorting through findings by mapping several ways to order the memos and create clear links between categories. I used note cards with various codes and/or categories written on them and then began to organize them according to the memos written. Then I drew out a simplified diagram along my organization of the note cards. Lastly, I compared the diagram to the transcripts and the initial codes identified in the early stages of analysis. The diagram constructed visually represents the relationship between the categories and themes. Visual diagramming is a GT research method recommended by Kathy Charmaz (2014) because this tool enables the researcher to better present the findings in a final written form. Overall, the goal was to understand the experience of the participants of the study and to capture the meaning of their artistic processes from their standpoints.

Next, I continued with theoretical sampling to ensure that the researcher captured important variations from participants. Gathering rich data until theoretical categories are fully explored and saturated is key feature of grounded theory. Early analysis showed that visual artists experiences included media, tools, and the availability of materials. Thus, I

conducted three follow-up interviews with previously interviewed artists in order to fill out the properties of these developing and tentative theoretical categories and the researcher revised a research question. I selected three artists who regularly worked with digital and/ multi-media artwork in order to address more deeply the role of changes in media, tools, and materials for artists' processes. By conducting follow-up interviews with theoretical sampling the categories and analysis became more precise, refined, and extended. Theoretical sampling is an example of the continuous nature of simultaneous data collection and analysis, the foundation of ground theory methodology. Also, the analysis of the follow-up interviews revealed that no more new information could be constructed from the data and the researcher was satisfied with the thoroughness of the data collection related to the research questions. Thus, I proceeded to the final stage of analysis.

The final stage of analysis involved developing the final constructed theory from the experiences of visual artists represented in all the interview data. This final process of analysis is overall theoretical integration. This organization serves as the bridge between the participants' descriptions of their experiences and the way this information makes most sense to the reader (Charmaz and Belgrave 2012). By integrating the analysis the researcher sorted and organized memos to draw connections across theoretical categories, and represented this in a visual map. The comprehensive analysis includes variations and divergent findings and does not try to fit the analysis into one explanation. These major findings are presented in Chapter Four.

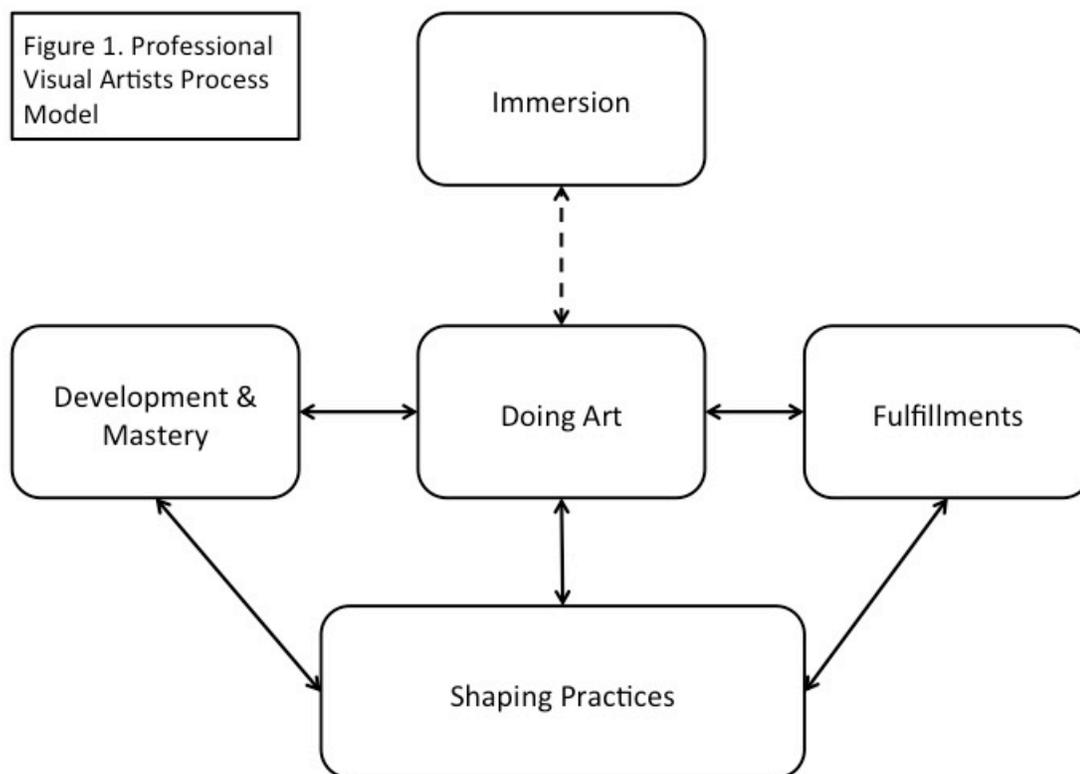
Chapter Five presents my conclusion in which I tie my work to larger iterations both theoretically and empirically.

## Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter provides a description of how visual artists view their actions and engender meaning when creating their artwork. The conceptual themes found present a framework for understanding how actions and meanings are made and experienced by artists when conceiving of and composing their visual work. Artists do not have an identical process or approach to making art; however, the themes found represent an organization of significant features for understanding artists' processes and experiences.

The framework of artists' process demonstrates the complex spectrum of experiences visual artists encounter in their everyday practices. The artists interviewed expressed many similar and patterned experiences, but with important differences and variations across these conceptual themes. For the analysis, there was no assumption of a universal process for the visual artists. Instead, an organization of the significant themes has enabled an understanding of how artists create meaning with their experiences, ideas, and actions, while also illustrating the differences in their processes.

Based on the interviews I conducted, I identified five theme that comprise the conceptual framework for visual artists' processes when making artwork: *shaping practices*, *development and mastery*, *doing art*, *immersion*, and *fulfillments*. The relationships between these themes are recursive and the process outlined is non-linear in that artists experience the organized themes more as feedback loops. Provided below is a visual representation of the substantive grounded theory as Figure 1.



### *Participants' Characteristics*

Twenty participants in the South Florida area were interviewed. All of the interviews were recorded with an audio device and the researcher took field notes after the interviews. All of the interviewees identified themselves as currently working professional visual artists. These artists varied in their national, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. They ranged in age from 25-65, and of the participants seven were women (n=7) and thirteen were men (n=13). The racial and ethnic characteristics of the persons in the sample were Black (n=1), European (n=2), Latino (n=9), and White (n=8).<sup>7</sup> Five of the interviewees were second generation Latinos with a variety of family origins: one

<sup>7</sup> Black refers to black American. European migrants are included as an ethnic group because although they may share similar physical characteristics with whites in the United States, European migrants have their own culture, which contributes to distinctive experiences for them living in the United States.

man with heritage from Colombia, two men with heritage from Cuba, one woman with heritage from Mexico, and one man with heritage from Venezuela. Six others migrated to the United States from other countries: two women from Argentina, one man from Chile, one man from France, one man from Germany, and one man from Venezuela. One male interviewee was African-American, and the other eight were white Americans (four women and four men). Table 1. illustrates the demographic information of the participants.

<b>Table 1. Participant Descriptions</b>	
<b>Category</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
<b>Gender</b>	
Women	7
Men	13
Total	20
<b>Age</b>	
Under 30	5
30-39	5
40-49	5
50-59	3
60-69	2
Total	20
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	
Black	1
European	2
Latino	9
White	8
Total	20
<b>Primary Medium</b>	
Painter	17
Sculptor	1
Illustrator	2
Total	20

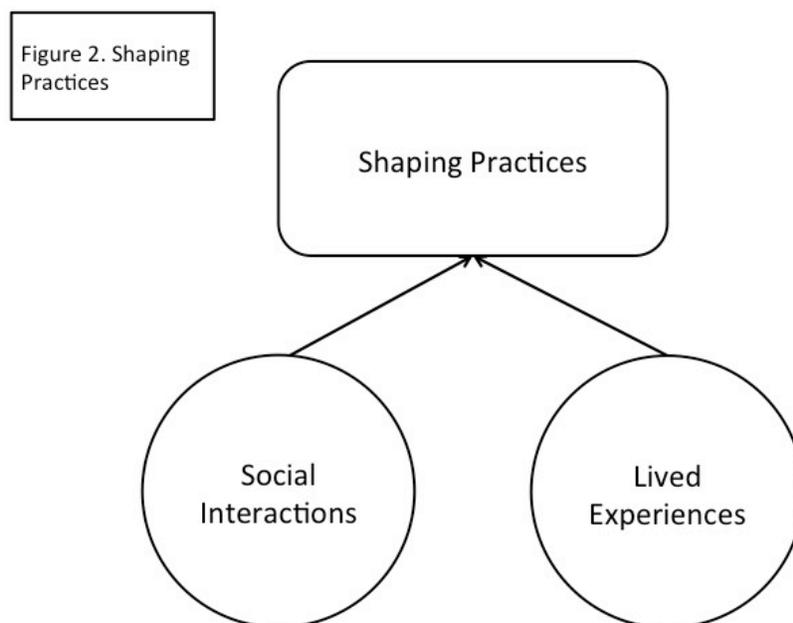
Seventeen of the twenty artists interviewed were primarily painters (n=17). The others were a sculptor (n=1), and two illustrators (n=2). Four of the painters considered themselves graffiti artists because they made murals and/or tags outdoors in public spaces with spray paint. Four painters primarily used mixed media, such as photography, layering with material objects, plastics, fabrics, and experimentation with wax or resin. Three others often worked with another medium, such as block art, printmaking, and inks. Two other painters considered themselves conceptual artists. These descriptions represent the types of art that the participants were creating at the time of these interviews; many of them had previously used other materials and may still change their primary media over time. Seven of the artists did both digital and material artwork. Additionally, three were professors of visual art (one woman and two men), and three were graduate students of visual art (one woman and two men). All of the participants were given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. Chart 1. provides brief background information about each artist and can be found in Appendix C.

### *Themes for Visual Artists and Their Artistic Process*

#### *1. Shaping Practices*

The theme *shaping practices* refers to the major factors that influence each artist's process of making artwork. This conceptual theme encompasses the ways that artists learn, interact with, and create meaning for the purpose of art-making. Shaping practices are the socio-experiential foundation that artists continuously rely upon. Shaping practices are the source of artists' learned skills, customary practices, artistic conventions, access to materials and tools, values and rewards of their work, and the meanings of their art-making within their art worlds.

Shaping practices are the context in which artists internalize social expectations. Artists' development of a social-experiential foundation reflects Mead's (1934) concept of socialization, in which artists learn conventions of art through interactions with others. However, shaping practices also reflect early pragmatist (Dewey [1922] 2012; Dewey and Bentley 1949; Reynolds 2003) considerations of the centrality of experiences and taking action in order to acquire social knowledge, as well as people's relationship to the material environment as a source of learning (Mead 1936). Significant shaping practices constructed by the researcher with interviewees' descriptions are *social interactions*, and *lived experiences*. Social interactions refer to the webs of relationships that continuously influences artists' creative process. Lived experiences are the situational, tactile, and material contexts, which artists develop as reliable habits or influences for creating. A visual representation of the conceptual theme shaping practices and related categories is provided below in Figure 2.



Artists learn and incorporate common artistic conventions and the personal value of making art from their social interactions, both informal and formal, into their shaping practices. Artists' expectations of the rewards of positive social reception and the anticipated interactions between the public and their artwork can shape the ways in which these artists approach their creative processes. The wider culture and art world for an artist is part of his or her social-experiential foundation. Moreover, artists described a variety of lived experiences as meaningful and impactful for their artistic processes. Lived experiences included their significant moments in their lives and situated environments that inspired artists' artwork and process. Visual inspirations such as other people's artwork, geometry, architecture, and nature shape an artist's approach. Lastly, lived experiences such as learned movements and actions of the body yield embodied knowledge. The social and situational contexts for artists are important to recognize because a visual artist's processes are typically a solitary activity. Indeed, artists often make art alone in their studios or workspaces. However, in doing art, they are constantly relying upon their social-experiential foundations, which make the art-making process more communal in nature.

Bradley, a painter, explains the significance of multiple types of shaping practices for his artistic process:

To be intuitive (when making artwork) is actually learned as well; so not intuitive like it fell out of the sky. We are a product of history and culture. I am of European culture and now I have American culture, and maybe it all comes together or whatever. But there is a learned behavior, and what is learned by others' behavior, as well. And then it's a learned gesture of types of lines over the years. In my case, this goes back to the landscape drawing I did a lot as a student. And spheres - those shapes really impacted me.

Bradley demonstrated by his use of the word “intuition” that the impact of shaping practices is not always explicit when he makes artwork. He recognized that he draws upon his social-experiential foundation as part of his process. Bradley identified that his actions when making artwork stem from his experiences of multiple cultures, social interactions with others, learned behaviors, and skills he acquired as an art student. Moreover, Bradley’s description demonstrates that shaping practices not only are learned from interacting with others but also occur essentially by doing. In that Bradley felt that his experience making certain shapes and lines continued to be influential in his current artwork. The major categories of shaping practices shared by the artists in the sample include social and experiential learning from which artists develop a reliable foundation to act from when composing their artwork.

*a. Social Interactions*

Social interactions are a significant way that artists learn the rewards and value of art-making, access materials and tools, familiarize themselves with artistic conventions, and become part of art worlds. Artists in this study described a variety of impactful relationships and interactions, both informal (family and friend support networks) and formal professional networks (teachers, professors, mentors, and peers). Also, artists sometimes create their pieces while imagining the receptions of their viewers and their own reactions to those imagined responses such as confidence. Lastly, the broader culture of South Florida and the art community there play influential roles in these artists’ shaping practices.

Early introductions to art-making are initiated by the artist’s interactions with family and friends. Support networks encourage and influence artists early on in their

lives by providing initial access to art materials, the shared feeling of enjoyment and fulfillment when doing artwork, and nascent learning of artistic conventions. Eighteen of the twenty artists said that they had close family members that were artists; common family members mentioned were fathers, mothers, grandmothers, and grandfathers. Artists recalled that their introductions to art were through interactions with these family members. When asked how he became interested in art, Howie recalled his family when he was a child:

I guess I was just always interested. I think when I was a kid I liked that. My father was kind of a Sunday painter... And, actually, his mother, my grandmother, was like that, too. When they would go on vacation, she would make a painting of the waterfront or, you know, whatever. And there are still some paintings around of hers. But I remember one day when I was kid it was a rainy day and my father had some paints and a canvas and we all made a painting together with him. It was really fun. And of course that was art as a social activity. It was me, my father, my sister, and one of my brothers. But yeah, I use *[sic]* to like to draw and doodle and do stuff like that. I think that I just enjoyed it. I enjoyed the feeling of it. And I felt engaged by it.

Howie explained that he interacted with art materials such as paints and a canvas with his father. Also, he learned to experience art as engaging, fun, and enjoyable with his family. Howie acquired experience with art-making as a part of his life. An important part of this social learning is that these early interactions last with artists throughout the maturation and development of their artistic process; the artists maintain feelings of fulfillment when making artwork. All of the artists identified deep enjoyment as an invaluable aspect of their pursuit and continuation of doing artwork.

As well as engaging in making art and learning to enjoy art-making, artists are provided access to situations and materials with which they can participate in art-making. Howie explained that his family vacations were a way for his family to paint together.

Similarly, Austin described how his grandmother being an artist provided the space and materials for his introduction to art:

Yeah, actually, my grandmother was a painter and has been an artist for the past 40 years of her life. She kind of inspired me to draw when I was really young, when I was 8 or 9 years old. I would go to her house and we would have, like, family dinners, you know celebrating New Year's or whatever. Any kind of holiday we would go to her house and she had a drawing table, a crafting table, drafting table, markers, paints everywhere, and brushes. And I would completely skip eating the meal or whatever it was, lunch or dinner, and I would go back into her studio and just experiment with all of her little different medium. I still have some of those drawings, actually.

Austin demonstrated that his family got him interested in art and provided the space, access, and necessary materials to engage in art. Access, enjoyment, and encouragement in art by support networks are a significant part of artists' shaping practices because artists begin to learn the value and rewards of art.

Friends and peers also influence artists' approaches to their work. Graffiti artist and muralist Paul explained some of the ongoing social influences for his artwork:

I kind of have a chameleon aspect; I like to be around a certain vibe of people. I hang with graffiti writers, I hang with street writers, and my boys are all like old bombers, you know. They are not necessarily professional or educated artists, but they have, like, a good vibe. I think that is very important because that is what keeps me running. I can ask, 'Do I like this, or not?'

Paul recalled that he likes to have friends around him because they have a certain style and "vibe." His continuous interaction with his "boys" inevitably brings up shared meanings and influences that Paul can then incorporate into his artwork.

Professional networks are also significant for artists' shaping practices. Sixteen of the artists attended art programs for their Bachelor's degrees, and several artists earned graduate degrees in visual art. In school, artists developed professional networks of teachers, mentors, and peers from which they learned technique, style, customary

practices, and the artistic conventions of their respective art worlds. Moreover, professional networks provided feedback, support, encouragement, and critique of each artist's work.

For example, the artists in sample that were professors and graduate students described the importance of monthly "crits," or critiques. Critiques are when students showcase their work in front of their peers. The artists' pieces are openly discussed and the students receive feedback. Not only did students develop shared meaning through praise about their work, but also they participated in giving critique and/or encouragement to others. Graduate student and abstract painter Roxie said:

Sometimes when I have a plan for a painting and I can't think of a way to describe it to my instructors, which can be bad [*sic*]. Because you have to do that, you have to be able to interact. But again that is what you go to school for, for painting, it is not necessarily just to learn how to paint. I know how to paint, it is how to articulate that process and what it is you like about painting. Yeah and being able to talk about your work, that is a huge part of why we go to school.

In this description, Roxie emphasized that part of schooling for an artist is learning how to interact and communicate with others. Social interactions with others help artists to construct a consistent foundation of conventions from which to work. Social learning shapes the ways an artist's approaches their art process.

Artists who did not attend formal school programs still had influential mentors who taught them foundations for art-making. Through interacting with these mentors and sharing their artwork, artists developed similar shaping practices as those developed by the art students. Austin, a graffiti and graphic design artist, explained:

Color theory is something is that I have recently grown to appreciate, same as line work and technique, things I am grateful enough to have had some awesome mentors in. And I fortunately have painted with some people that I have always been inspired by, which is great. So I think it's just like anything: if you do it enough, you kind of learn techniques and

the rules, and I have always been an advocate of learning the rules in order to break them.

Professional networks provide direct opportunities for social learning that artists continue to use. Austin demonstrated that social learning occurs through the process of becoming proficient in conventions and customary practices not only by interacting and communicating with others but also by deliberate practice. For visual artists, both the shared meaning and the practical actions of *doing* – making artwork- are significant for building social-experiential foundations.

Moreover, Austin described the significance for an artist to learn more formal technique and theoretical aspects of doing art (what he calls “the rules”), and then going beyond those conventions. James, a professor of painting, also commented on this step for art students:

What I call a really advanced student - and I have a couple of graduate students like that - they know a lot. I mean, I have three graduate students and they've looked at an awful lot of painting[s]... And our basic drawing and painting course [is] really good. They really teach you how to do it. Now, when you get up higher to the three or four hundred level [courses], it gets a little more complicated because you are really then dealing with some people who have technique but they need to get a little more sophisticated in what is good. And often that involves violating some of the technical things that they have learned. But, if you haven't learned the technical things, you can't violate them.

James pointed out the importance of artists developing shared meaning in their understanding and application of art technique. He emphasizes that his advanced students have viewed a lot of paintings and that, as a result, these students successfully applied their knowledge. Also, like Austin, who did not go through schooling, James stressed that in order for student artists to improve their art processes, they must first master conventions and then learn how to break them. A significant way in which artists learn conventions is through their formal social interactions with teachers, mentors, and peers.

Jason, a painter and sculptor, also recounted the importance of his relationships with other artists and professionals in his art world:

I do have a handful of people that have become friends that I trust. You know, professionally. And we exchange either opportunities, or I say ‘Hey, I have this, what do I do?’ When I have a real serious question, I go to my network of people I have met in the business that I may not be very close to, but I trust them. And people that have their own galleries or they run an art fair, you know. People you don’t want to bother every day but they’re the ones. That’s what I reach for.

When Jason felt he needed to ask questions for his projects he sought out people for help with new approaches. He has surrounded himself with people he trusts to find shared knowledge that is meaningful for him. Networks provide sources of information that are continuously important for artists.

When artists learn conventions they can then apply these in their approaches to their artwork. Artists can imagine what their viewers will see and how viewers will react to their work. By internalizing and anticipating how their work will impact other people, artists modify their approach to their work in order for the artists to have a sense of success or accomplishment with their work. In sociology, this type of social interaction is referred to as the looking glass self (Cooley 1902). Artists said they sometimes approached their artwork by thinking about “the viewer” or by “imagining” people’s responses as described by Marie. The looking-glass self phenomenon occurs more frequently for artists doing public art like graffiti and murals, commissioned pieces, or graphic design work. These types of pieces have a larger public viewership, and, in some cases, a specific audience, so these artists are more aware of other people’s reactions in order to accomplish their own goals. Austin, the graffiti artist, explained his approach to public projects:

So, as I was saying earlier, I am trying to do graffiti with a different objective in mind. I have been thinking more about the viewer and the people who respond to it as opposed to just writing my name. Although I think both of those things have meaningful importance.

Austin discussed how he thinks about how people will react to his street work. Austin identified extrinsic social rewards in consideration of his artwork. Similarly, Marie, a painter and a muralist, described the difference between doing art without imagining the viewer and when considering the viewer:

Well, when I'm doing my own thing, you know, it's easy. Because I have my own stuff and I work better with color and I like to balance color with lines. But yeah, when I'm doing something for the public, say, or for a public art project, yeah, you have to think about the space, the neighborhood, the history of the area, the community input. It's a bunch of different things.

Marie reflected that it is easier for her to work without considering the viewer because when she does a mural she tries to take into account the community's perspective and its possible reactions to her piece and her feelings of success with her project.

However, several artists mentioned that they avoided or rejected thinking about the viewers' perspectives when making their artwork. Selma, a painter and multimedia artist, provided an example:

And it's awesome when you have a client coming over to buy the piece or commission a piece like this (points to painting) and they have a different theory and they're thinking on the two women sleeping together. And when you started to tell them the story of the pregnancy and the shadow, they look at you like, 'Okay, don't tell me more.' For example, this is a huge piece and I did it three times already. And it's a piece that men want to buy, and collectors want to buy. It's my most expensive piece... To me it's so obvious that this is my pregnancy series. And to be honest with you, I thought that I was not going to sell a single piece from this series. Because it's just so personal to me, me and my baby, breastfeeding. Like, who wants to have this? But that, to me, is the other part of the art. The commercial part. Because when I'm doing this, I'm totally pure and I'm going with my instincts and I don't even care if you like red or blue or whatever.

Selma illustrated that despite the reaction by viewers to her pregnancy series, which features a double portrait of herself, she does not change her approach in consideration of the viewer. She explained that she does not take into account what people like or do not like about her artwork. These artists provide an example of the range of visual artists feelings about taking into account their audience as a way to (in their view) successfully create an original piece of artwork. Many of the artists of the study were not concerned with people's reactions and others, depending on the type of piece and medium, gave meaning to picturing their audiences' responses.

Lastly, for social interactions artists identified the wider culture they are part of as influential. Like the quotation earlier from Bradley, in which he discussed being part of multiple cultures (European and American) other artists also recognized the cultures of Miami and of South Florida as influential. Xander, a painter and conceptual artist, described his impression of Miami and of the artist scene there:

More than anywhere else in the country, Miami has this misguided attitude, because New York has an attitude too but at least they have something to back it up with. They have this history and all this money and influence to go along with it. We don't have as much money or influence to lend to such an attitude. Which is kind of charming in its way and I have learned to really find it kind of endearing... So yeah, on the surface, that is how I feel the city is. But in this particular area (Wynwood) and what is happening to it, there is like a subculture here that is very earnest about what they are doing, which seems to be an antithesis to what is going on the surface of this city. There is a movement against this attitude, this need to be earnest and honest about what they are trying to say. And sometimes, for some people, it comes on as a bit too cheesy, but, given the dichotomy between the city, it is actually refreshing.

Xander recalled the art district of Miami called Wynwood as a place where artists are reacting to the general cultural attitude they perceive in Miami. Xander explained that the art world of Wynwood embodies a feeling of honesty, and later he described that artists' work in that area confront the wider culture in an "ironic way."

Overall, social interactions are significant in the socio-experiential foundation that artists maintain, continuously add to, and reinvent. Support networks such as family provide early access to the value and rewards of art, general encouragement, participation, and access to materials for art. Also, friends and peers serve as sources of feedback and inspiration for artists. Artists use professional networks to learn not only technique but also customary practices and conventions for producing artwork. Artists sometimes imagine their viewers' reactions to their artwork in order to make a successful piece of work from the artists' perspective. Lastly, the broader culture with which artists interact shapes their approaches to making art.

*b. Lived Experiences*

Lived experiences are the situations, visual influences, and actions of the body that artists recognize as meaningful for their shaping practices. These codes are included under the broad category of experience because of the more tactile nature of these shaping practices, in contrast to social interactions, the influences of other people. Lived experiences can be subtler and less explicit in their impact on the artists' social-experiential foundations. Pragmatists Dewey and Bentley (1949) emphasize the importance of experiential learning for people when acquiring knowledge about social conventions. Situations refer to the lived moments and environments that artists encounter.

Visual influences include inspirations that artists seek intentionally and come across unintentionally, such as looking at other artists' work and also photography, architecture, geometry, science, and experiencing nature. Actions of the body capture the importance of learning with the physical body kinesthetically when making artwork.

Embodied learning and knowledge demonstrate that experiential learning can occur with the actions of the physical body. The finding of embodied knowledge for visual artists is similar to Erin O'Connor's (2005) ethnographic findings with artistic glassblowing. Artists acquire practical knowledge about their craft by repetition of, and/or experimentation with, body gestures and movements. Taken together, lived experiences can overlap with social interactions, but lived experiences also account for foundational learning that is indirect, unintentional, and more physically tangible. The category of lived experiences is oriented around actions that are not necessarily social interactions and captures the artists' relationships and knowledge acquired from situations they are in, visual images and artifacts they utilize, and the role of their physical body as part of their shaping practices.

Garret, a graduate student print-maker and painter, described the significance of a variety of his lived experiences for his artistic process:

I think it is where you find yourself in your life, and different stages of your life. Things that impact your personal life could be the environment, relationships, and many many different things could force you to try to release them in a creative method... It really depends on the mood that I am in, or the time, or where I find my life is at. It definitely has a lot to do with my surroundings, the environment, and the emotional environment as well. For example, I like linoleum cuts so they can be political in aspects or social commentaries on certain things I am very passionate about. And then if I am not doing that then I really emphasize [*sic*] the creative process or the connection I have with the material. While I am making, I tend to be somewhat aggressive sometimes with the work back here, as you can see, and I really enjoy making marks and dealing with atmospheres and textures and the landscape. Even though they are not exactly landscapes, they are kind of representational of landscapes. So I think living in Florida and being here most of my life, it is a very flat geography, you know, so the landscape is always in the back of my mind, subconsciously.

Garret pointed out the subtle ways he feels that his life experiences impact his art. Particularly interesting are the ways he describes the materials as a way to either

communicate, to show his mastery, or a source from which to be creative. Also, he identified the flat geography of South Florida as having a “subconscious” effect on his technical approach and on the content of his artwork. Artists identified their lived experiences as both directly and indirectly incorporated into their art-making processes.

Situations are the commonly occurring and sometimes more subtle aspects of artists’ shaping practices. Artists encounter life moments such as changes in their family lives and in their physical environments. Selma, a painter and mixed-media artist, described the effect of a lived moment for her and her body of work in which she painted double images of herself:

I am going back now and saying wow, this is beautiful. I felt like dying at the time I was four months pregnant and now I'm looking at this (painting) like, ‘Oh my God, look at this.’ Because I was dealing with that, my third kid, and the first month I'm like, ‘should I have this baby? Am I crazy? I'm forty-one. Is this safe or not? I'm scared. I'm getting older. I'm not feeling great with the pregnancy. What should I do?’ I was working on that. And the paintings are dark and nothing is happy. And then when you revisit it, you see all the colors. And that's when other things come to your life... Women, we are the ones working the family, doing everything, breastfeeding. I wish I could have a double sometimes to help me.

Here Selma recalled her series of work during her third pregnancy in which she painted double self-portraits. During the pregnancy she had doubts, was scared, and felt overwhelmed with motherhood and she perceived her created work as a dark reflection of her life. In her explanation, she realized this series was done before she had a nanny to help with the kids, when she felt like she had to be more than one person. For Selma, this life moment shaped the content and tone of her approach to her artwork.

For the three female artists who were mothers the change of entering motherhood was described as significant for their art. For these artists having the responsibility of

children in their lives became significant in shaping their approach to their work. As

Marie explained:

I think it's amazing because you really grow when you become a mom. You really grow and your art will grow. And it's like, it's really, it's a sort of a separation. Not because you're going to paint babies with moms and all that but it's like, it's a feeling, you know. The feeling you have inside that makes you, I don't know, deeper.

Marie described a deeper feeling when making her artwork after having her first child.

Marie provided an example of how she felt more connected with her artistic process after a life-changing situation. She also stressed that the changes she felt did not affect the content of what she created,

Next, artists described seeking out or coming across visual inspiration from a variety of sources. Seeing and interacting with visual inspirations was a way for artists to add to their shaping practices by exposing themselves to techniques and concepts that would motivate the artists' own approaches. As James pointed out, some of his best students have looked at "an awful lot of paintings." Inspiration is also derived from different types of art, such as photography, architecture, geometry, and digital artwork. Leo, a conceptual and multimedia artist, recalled several sources of visual inspiration for his artwork:

Like everything from mandalas to architecture and then understanding space and proportion and association, um, kind of in a chemical way. So it has become more about learning what certain systems do in ways that I can't describe. So, for example, one of the biggest influences was going to Rome and walking into the Pantheon and feeling this immense pull like reverse gravity from the middle and just being like, 'Oh what's going on?' ... I started to do research and I found that the geometry present in this space is so focused that it does do something to you physically. Forget about spiritually; you are physically affected. You know your guts are being pulled out of you when you are in this space. Architecture has this effect whether you are aware of it or not. And it can have the opposite, you could be in a cubicle and be miserable and there is like this crunched energy where there is no flow. Or it could be the Pantheon with this

amazing flow. So I am interested in that and, yeah, I guess how geometry affects us.

Leo reflected on his inspirations as a range from geometry to architecture and that he incorporated these into his work by applying his understanding of space and proportion. He explained that his experiencing and thinking about geometry and architecture like the Pantheon gave him ideas about the flow and feeling of space. This example suggests that interactions with visual inspirations can impact artists' approaches to their work.

Shannon, a mixed-medium artist and painter, explained the variety of types of visual inspirations she has used:

With this project that I'm talking about, the Internet was a great resource, specifically Pinterest. It's phenomenal what you can find for, 'art deco fan pattern.' I knew sort of what I wanted to go for. I figured out what that pattern would be called kind of in an Internet search and called images up and sort of just chased them through Pinterest to see related images, and it was a really fantastic tool for this project. That's not always the case, though... If I'm on a walk and I see shapes, certain textures together, a lot of it will be inspired from nature. So it's not always drawn from other images of art or other drawings or other related mediums. Sometimes it will be a very different translation of an idea, where I like the texture of something woven and I try to translate something three dimensional into two-dimensional because I like the way the shapes move together. Something like that. It's challenging because the inspiration can really just come from everything.

Shannon described finding visual inspiration by utilizing the Internet. Several other artists, particularly those in their twenties and thirties, described looking online often for inspiration. Valor and Helena were both illustrators and graphic designers and often discussed using the photograph sharing site Instagram to find inspiration when drawing. The findings from these interviewees suggest that using the Internet for inspiration is generational. Going online is a way for artists to actively seek out visual inspiration when they are planning a specific piece or looking for a way to motivate themselves.

Roxie, the abstract painter and graduate student, gave another example of the direct and deliberate role of visual inspiration for her process:

It is really important that I have everything around me to look at. Sometimes I will open up five or six tabs on my computer of different images just because I didn't have time to print them out. Plus I will have, like, fifteen drawings that I did from other things. So I can say, 'You know, that element would look really good in this piece.' So it is important, I think, to have everything easily accessible and available, so you can grab it and you can look at it.

Roxie described how she kept visual images around her while she painted as a regular part of her process. She used these images to inspire her by considering whether she thought they would appear successful when incorporated into her piece. Visual inspirations are a type of interaction that artists use to add to their learning, because artists discover new visual influence to add into their shaping practices. Also, visual influences demonstrate that artists deliberately seek out conventions and inspirations to continuously build on their previous social-experiential learning.

Lastly, for lived experiences, the actions of the body can help artists gain knowledge that shapes their approach to making artwork. Artists described the use of their bodies as an valuable source of knowledge through the experience of their actions. The body as a source of knowledge is consistent with other symbolic interactionist studies (Brandt 2006; Huggins 2006; Kotarna and Held 2006; Pagis 2009). Some interviewees explained that the motions of their hands were influential to how they approached their artwork. Artists discussed the body as important in the ways they train their gestures, and how they think and move.

Artists viewed their hands in order to learn when making art. Abstract painter and professor Bradley described how he trains his hand to better his approach to his work:

I had some of the conditioning (from working with certain shapes), so I did blind drawings. So without that compositional necessity of checking with the eye, I gave myself assignments. So, like, on the paper, I draw lines up and down, I make a circle in the middle, and so on. And they were white on white so I couldn't see it. And later, I was actually blindfolded. But then adding the paint on the drawing shows it off and then I can see what I did. And then I can use that as a step-by-step to continue the work. Those drawings show me now that I can challenge myself to do better quality. So there are different ways, I can be better off by not seeing. It is a different challenge.

Bradley described that he already felt conditioned in some of his movements and gestures from drawing and painting. In order to take his shapes and line work to a higher level of quality, he developed his memory of physical gestures. By developing the actions of his body, Bradley learned from his experience; he allowed himself to gain knowledge through his movement without visual evaluation in the moment, and then later judged the quality of his lines and shapes.

Paul, a graffiti artist and muralist, when asked if he does free flow with his paintings, recounted the following:

Well, a lot of it is hand eye coordination and thinking. But you get to a point, and I guess the interesting part, what I pull out of it that is special is that there is almost like an autopilot in my brain and my hand has a kind of memory to it, like a motion memory. And it is happening and I am kind of watching in peace, you know, and overlooking it. I am not really controlling it, so that is were I like to be, but it is not always easy to get there.

Paul's experience with his body movements shows more explicitly how gestures and thinking occur together. Paul explained that by focusing his thoughts he felt in sync with his body; his actions and gestures occurred as if he did not fully control them. The continual experiences and practices with body movements are a part of artists' approaches to their work, so much so that Paul described this unison of his movements and thoughts as a "special" part of his process.

Tom a painter and multi-media artist described his experience with his sense and the physical materials he used:

When I paint or draw it is more physical and everything happens right away in front of my eyes. It's a lot of fun. It's like an addiction, when I start painting I don't want to stop. And you have the smell of the paper, the paint, and the touch of the fabric. It's very sensual.

Tom's description draws attention to his relationship with materials as physical and resulting in deep enjoyment and pleasure. Several artists echoed the feeling that using their hands and senses when creating with physical materials was deeply enjoyable. Artists like Marie and Vicky similarly describe their experience of working with materials as addictive, as well as in their words "therapeutic." Artists like Noah and Selma also emphasized the cathartic effect of painting and creating with physical materials.

Artists construct their socio-experiential foundation through their shaping practices which are the primary ways that artists learn customary practices, learn the value and rewards of art-making, have access to art materials, seek out visual inspirations, and internalize artistic conventions. Through social interactions and lived experiences, artists build a foundation from which they work and continuously reinvent conventions while making their artwork. Following the nature of social interactions shaping practices are also fluid and ever changing. Using this foundation, artists master and develop their skills, knowledge, and their general approaches to making art.

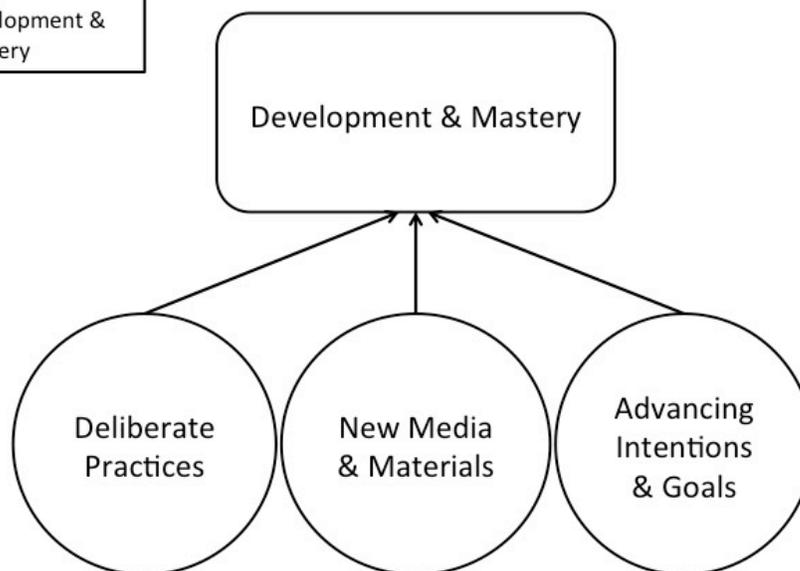
The emergence of the social foundation for artists' meaning-making processes jointly occurs with their actions, meaning that artists learn by *doing* and by interacting with the world around them. These findings are similar to the early pragmatists' point that both the social field and the material environment inform people's learning and

actions (Dewey [1929] 1958; Mead 1936). Shaping practices are both the lived experiences for artists and the foundation of shared symbols upon which they rely upon when creating artwork. This foundation does not occur as a backdrop, but rather as an ongoing interaction through which an artist continuously reaffirms, modifies, and reinvents his or her shared meaning. Lastly, the categories of social and situational knowledge are not necessarily experienced separately and are understood as overlapping. Social contexts are not conceptualized as isolated influences, practices, and experiences; instead, as a more complex and dynamic basis from which artists act, make decisions, and build knowledge and skill.

## 2. *Development and Mastery*

The theme *development and mastery* is the ways in which visual artists see themselves pushing their artistic process to the professional level. This conceptual theme captures the aspects of an artist's process that he or she identified as improving the quality of their artistic abilities. This theme includes the artist's mastery of techniques and skill by deliberate increase in practicing, the use of new materials and media, and the development of more mature ideas and a more established intention behind the pieces. Development and mastery is an advanced stage of artists' processes from which they refine their learned skills, master their use of materials and tools, and interact with more complex artistic conventions. Important ways that artists develop and master their processes are outlined in the focused categories *deliberate practices*, *new media and materials*, and *advancing intentions and goals*. A visual representation of the conceptual theme and related categories is provided below in Figure 3.

Figure 3.  
Development &  
Mastery



*a. Deliberate Practices*

Many of the artists described the importance of continuous and deliberate practice of creating when asked about their processes. Bradley explained practice as contributing to “more depth” in his use of artistic conventions. Shannon, a multimedia artist, said practice is the way to “genuinely develop skills.” The artists in the sample have been creating artwork anywhere from many years to a few decades. These artists work daily in their studio spaces making visual pieces, strengthening their skills and their use of artistic conventions. Christopher, a graffiti painter, who does realistic portraits explained:

The portraiture on canvas is kind of an exercise. It's me kind of honing my abilities each year. And it's been fun. I didn't think that there would be noted improvement. After a while, I thought it would be kind of like hitting a wall. But even now, you know, I probably started doing the portraiture back in 2005, I think. And nine years later, I'm still like, wow, I'm still getting a little better at this, which is cool.

Christopher demonstrated that even after nine years of working on his technique, he still finds that he improves the more he practices. Similarly, graffiti artist Paul described his process as “ definitely just a practice thing.” Some of the artists described their continuous increase in practice as a way to become as in Jason’s words “fluent” in their art-making. Shannon said she became “literate in the language of shapes.” In general, artists identified constant practice as a critical way that they mastered their craft.

*b. New Media and Materials*

Many artists explained that they felt that working with new media and materials pushed their mastery forward. Artists who used several media or experimented with new materials and media identified that this drives their progress. Garret described his approach to his work in the following way:

I really emphasize the creative process or the connection I have with the material while I am making. I tend to be somewhat aggressive sometimes with the work. Back here, as you can see (points to artwork behind him), *[sic]* and so I really enjoy making marks and dealing with atmospheres and textures and the landscape. Even though they are not exactly landscapes, they are kind of representational of landscapes.

Garret likened his creativity to his connection with the material. Other artists made similar statements recognizing that they like to use materials as a challenge to make the materials “just a little different,” as Christopher said.

Another way that artists used materials to increase their mastery was by experimenting. Marie described her experience in the following way:

I like to experiment with different materials. I'm not like, ‘Okay, I'm good at this, and I want to keep doing this.’ I like to learn, you know. Go and see what else I can do. And so I try, [and] that's when I discovered that I can use resin to finish my paintings. I like the shine. You know. It's very nice. And I've been doing the same with my sculptures.

Artists discovered new materials often through interactions with other people, other artists, or by reading about those materials. For example, Marie said that she learned to work with resin because her husband is a contractor and he mentioned it and then taught her how to use it. Ethan, a multimedia artist, explained how he discovered new materials:

You know, just reading something, and like the encaustics, for example, I was reading a book on architecture... I was thinking more about public art, and you know you have to deal with architects when you do public art... And there was a picture of a little child in some Catholic Church chapel in Europe somewhere, and the child was blind and they were rubbing all the child's hands over the walls because the walls were encaustic! And so I said 'Oh! You know, I should try that.' And that is how it happened. But years ago, I curated a show at Broward College, and one of the artists I asked to be in the show, she was from Philadelphia and was doing encaustic and that was probably the first time I was really up close to encaustic. All of her work is encaustic painting. So it is very beautiful, you know.

Ethan demonstrated that he learned about encaustic from both reading and seeing another artists use it.

The tactile and physicality of materials were often described as significant for artists' artistic process, not only through social interactions but also in terms of experiential learning. Shannon a painter and print artists demonstrated:

But in the process, in the actual art-making of it, there is things called happy mistakes, which are things that you never meant to do, you never thought of doing, but you're quite content with how it looked anyway... Like I just inked it up too much but then when I went to print it, it lifted from the page in a really interesting way. And it's like, maybe I will try again for that technique. And maybe not. Every time I come to make a piece of anything there is an element of co-creating with the material itself. I don't always know how certain materials are going to respond to one another.

Shannon explained that every time she creates she encounters unanticipated results.

Shannon showed that "happy mistakes" were a way she part of her experiential learning.

She said that sometimes she likes what she did so much that she chooses to do it again in other pieces. Thus, her unanticipated actions in turn informed her shaping practices.

Moreover, artists identified their creative actions as occurring when working with multiple materials, and/or techniques and media. Tom a painter and multi-media artist said:

To create something different than anybody else, something you never saw before I mix all different types of materials and techniques to create something really organic and different. For example when I frame my paintings or photographs I'm using a metal frame altered with acid and pigments. They don't look like any other frames. And my photos have a lot of texture on them to make them look like a painting.

Tom's description echoes several artists' feelings that some of his creative and original contributions to his artwork came from manipulating or working with materials and multiple techniques. For Tom, mixing multiple dispositions of conventions is a source of creativity in his work. Other artists who worked with several materials emphasized their relationship to the materials was part of their a process in which they encountered discovery and surprises. These artists that learned to leave room for the unexpected and uncontrollable when using certain materials or techniques in order to create something unique and original.

Thus, artists' uses of new materials loops back into artists shaping practices in the category of social interactions and lived experiences. Artists continuously acquired social and experiential learning when interacting with new media and materials. Artists described elevating their skills by mastering new materials and techniques in their art-making processes. In general, most of the artists of the study demonstrated a continuous interest in investigating and learning about new techniques such as encaustic, technologies such as digital programs, and working with new materials such as resin. As

Tom described, “I love to change mediums and techniques, and I love to discover new things.” Additionally, some artists identified working with materials or multiple materials as a source of creativity.

*c. Advancing Intentions and Goals*

Another significant way that artists deepen their processes is by developing a clearer intention behind their work. Practice and mastery over materials adds to an artist’s confidence and a sense of familiarity with his or her own art-making process. Further, the development of ideas enables a clearer trajectory for an artist’s work. Ideas refer not just conceptual intentions but instead a range of goals or purposes an artist has for creating his or her work. Artists described that their ideas behind making artwork are not necessarily about a social message or narrative. For example, Bradley said the purpose of his art is to create an “interaction of the moment” with the viewer and the piece. Similarly, James said that he considers art to be something that “moves you.” Conceptual artist Leo referred to his works as a “conversation.” However, other artists did say that their aims with their work were mainly about a story or a message to the viewer. For instance, Howie described his intention behind his performance art:

And you think, ‘Ok, there are specific goals here.’ But an artist is not thinking of a specific goal in the beginning, at least. You know, for me now, I have narrowed it down, I am what you might call a mature artist, and I found out that I like performing and creating different characters of *[sic]* who I think reflect the social whole. I want to do something of Carl Jung’s eight archetypes [be] cause that interests me. Carl Jung interests me and his idea of this sort of spiritual aspect of human beings in our search for meaning, and so forth.

Howie explained that he wants to embody a particular concept for his viewers. He also pointed out that he thinks a marker of a mature artist is having a goal with one’s art.

Another type of goal identified by several other artists is the display of their mastery of technique, material, and skill. Numerous artists in the sample stated that embodying a clear idea and showing mastery were their overall goals for their artwork.

For example, Christopher, a realistic spray paint artist, said:

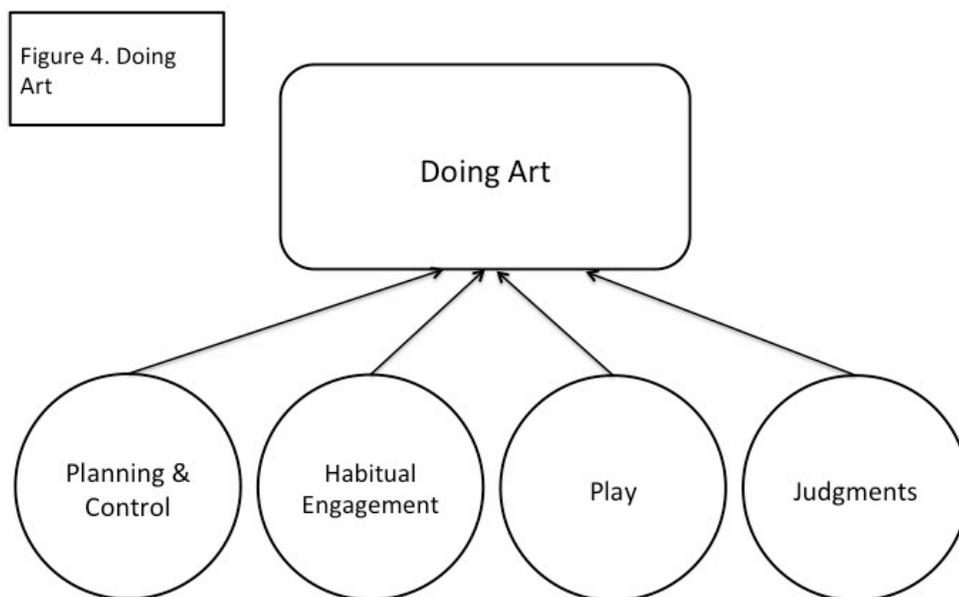
I definitely want people to recognize instantly the formal training that's there and then, past that, see something that's a little bit different, a little bit curious.

Christopher discussed that when people look at his work he wants them to recognize his mastery as well as his concept to communicate his novelty as an artist. For Christopher and other professional artists, the overall goal of their work is to show a balance of both skill and intentionality with their work. Artists' "ideas" or conceptual intentions can range from communicating something that is visually quirky or different to making a social or political statement.

Artists deepen their approaches to their work through deliberate practice, working with new media and materials, and by having clearer intentions and goals. Development and mastery, like shaping practices, is not a point or place the artists' reach, but rather a way that an artist continuously interacts and advances his or her art-making process. By increasing their practice, artists deepen their skill sets and their use of materials. When artists engage with new materials and media, they push their experience and their knowledge of their art-making process further. Artists view themselves as having a more mature approach to artwork when they have clearer intentions and goals with their art, thus enveloping themselves in more complex artistic conventions. Artistic development and mastery rests on artists' earlier formed shaping practices and significantly contributes to the moments in which these artists actually create their artwork.

### 3. *Doing Art*

The theme *doing art* is the various approaches of an artist's process in which the artist directly uses his or her actions and thoughts to make a piece of art. This theme captures the significant phenomenon of an artist's immediate creation in the moment of doing and making. Artists call upon or interact with their previous shaping practices and with their development and mastery when immediately engaged. Organized in this theme are the ways in which artists execute their skills and knowledge. Although four main categories are identified as occurring when artists' compose their work, often the artists experience several if not all of these phenomena as interwoven together throughout their moments when making. Artists often described their immediate action of doing as in abstract painter James's words an "unclean" process in which they move between multiple categories of more planned and controlled aspects, to an engaged routine, discovering and investigating, and having to make decisive choices. These various types of actions are not necessarily separate but instead represent a multi-dimensional process in which artists engage. The main categories for doing art are *planning and control*, *habitual engagement*, *play*, and *judgments*; a visual representation of the conceptual theme and related categories is provided below in Figure 4.



*a. Planning and Control*

Planning and control refers to the artists' descriptions of their immediate thoughts for a project in which they thinking through their actions and self-consciously making those expected movements. All of the artists recalled the importance of thinking and planning when making their artwork. Leo described planning as "having a clear idea in the mind," and as "linear thought." Moments of planning were when artists had a more methodical process. Planning was often discussed as the practical part of an artist's process. For artists, planning and control represented the most explicit application of their symbolic learning. This approach included preparation of materials, ideas, measurements, sketches, applying technique, and other technical considerations for making a piece of artwork.

Many artists described a well-organized and consistent routine when planning out their work. The planning stage is characterized by artists' experiences of thinking through

their preceding actions step-by-step. As Paul explained when asked about how he comes up with an idea for a piece:

It takes a lot of just brainstorming, sometimes they [ideas] just occur. But it is a constant battle between overthinking and just thinking enough... I was always good at communicating ideas, I have a real knack for that. If something needs to be said or visual problem needs to be solved, I am the man for that.

Paul described his planning as thinking and organization for making a piece of visual art.

Paul also mentioned that sometimes, ideas just happen without planning, which most artists explained as occurring in moments when they are visually or intellectually inspired, as previously discussed in the theme of shaping practices.

Planning is often a large part of an artist's attention and effort when he or she is making artwork. As Roxie, an abstract painter, illustrated:

It is work. It is it is a lot of work. It is not like this emotional fun process for me. It's work, it's step by step, I plan it out. I usually start with the background and work my way to the foreground. And then it usually reaches this point where things are kind of going on top, and that is when it is a little more intuitive. Adding in colors or objects, things that I just know it needs to make it pop. Different textures, stuff like that. And those come from just looking at other painters, mostly: what are they doing, what can I do differently, or how can I make that my own.

Roxie explained that she made her painting step-by-step. At another point in the interview, Roxie referred to herself as a "methodical painter." She approached her work by carefully composing her steps. Roxie also said that she received the most positive feedback from her peers when her pieces were more systematically planned out. Also, in Roxie's description, she mentioned that her process of thinking through and painting is connected to her shaping practices.

Planning takes up some of the most amount of time and energy for an artist when conceiving and composing a piece of artwork. Tom described a series he worked on:

Before I start a new piece I think a lot about the process. For example with the new watercolor series about the wolves I thought a lot about the way I want to paint them. I want them strong, not just nice cute drawings. So I thought about painting with two brushes, one in each hand, one for the water and one for the wolves. Like I want the energy of the paint to reflect the animal.

Tom's description demonstrated that his planning occurred as thinking and that planning makes up a large part of conceiving the way to approach doing a piece. Tom described thinking through technique, materials, and style in order to accomplish the effect and feel of the pieces.

Next, many artists described their actions as "very controlled," as in Garret's words, during moments when their thought processes were more explicit. Many of the artists described at times experiencing less awareness of their thought process when working. Artists would reflect and think through their actions, usually with an internal dialogue. When asked by the interviewer, "Are you thinking about your actions?"

Bradley explained how he used more overt and explicit thought:

Yeah, that is the tricky part. There are very different types of lines: some are tentative, some are very decisive, and more knowing or less knowing, thicker or thinner. There is [a] huge variety of possibilities. That is something I'm that I thinking about, but sometimes I lose that because I am not focusing. I am distracted by other thoughts, usually a mix of things.

Bradley described thinking about the types of lines he made when crafting the marks with his hand and brush. He demonstrated that he thought through his actions as he performed them. Artists described explicitly thinking through their moments as way to exert control over their processes. Control for artists is about applying their knowledge of artistic conventions through their developed skills, and executing those expectations the way they planned to in their minds.

Planning and control for artists occurred more often when they had an overall idea about the piece they wanted to make. At this stage, artists are the most aware of the action they need to perform, as indicated by their thought processes as internal conversations. The finding of reflective thought is similar to symbolic interactionist George Herbert Mead's ([1934] 1969) concept of reflexivity, which explains that explicit reflective and self-monitoring thought occurs when people are applying or interacting with social conventions and expectations. With planning, artists anticipated and predicted the situations they wanted to create when making their piece; they knew where they wanted to go with their actions. Thus, during planning, artists expected to compose certain marks, lines, patterns, and more because they had an idea of the steps they were taking. Planning and control moments are a significant part of an artist's immediate artistic process, and these moments account for much of the artist's time and effort.

*b. Habitual Engagement*

Artists talked about the frequent repetition of their actions during their art-making processes. Artists described feeling as if their actions were automatic, like their hands and intentions moved from memory. Professional artists' actions became predictable and became a process of habit. Unlike in planning and control, in habitual engagement, artists described themselves as experiencing less internal dialogue and specific thoughts; however, at the same time, they also stressed that they felt very focused on their work at hand. Interviewees explained that they remained engaged in their tasks at hand, despite the seemingly natural experience with their actions. When April discussed being deep in her work, she said, "I would say I am focused but it comes more natural." Artists reached

points in their work when they feel like they relied less on thinking about their pre-planned idea.

However, experiencing more spontaneity does not mean that artists felt that they were disengaged from their work. Shannon explained how she experienced repetitive moments:

I think habitual to me implies a sort of disengaged attention. Where it's more muscle memory and less present in a way. And every time I come into that space, I'm excited and I'm ramped up. I'm a little – I'm more attentive. It's not habitual. I know the steps that I need to take, so it's familiar. And I'm like, okay, I know I need these, I need this, I need that, I'm going to lay it out like that, cool. But it's like, every time, I'm like okay, and am I going to lay it this way, am I going to lay it that way. There's variation to it in the sense that each time is new. And I feel like of the many things in my life that I do that are the same over and over and over, all the many things that we have to do that we repeat often, is one of the things I always feel very present with. I never feel like it's a habit or boring.

Shannon compared the occurrence of her habits to familiarity with what to expect when composing her artwork, but she emphasized that her habitual behavior was not mindless. She showed that concentration was important even when interviewees' actions seemed predictable. Other artists echoed a similar experience and stressed that their art-making improved when they could focus. Howie explained that learning to focus came as a result of considerable practice and experience.

However, Shannon also described that habitual engagement still remains exciting for her. In contrast, however, Vicky, a painter, felt that repetition in her actions limited new discovery and creativity in her work. She explained:

There was a point where I was starting to feel things were becoming formulaic for me and repetitive. And that I was not tapped into, you know, like investigation as much and play.

Vicky's description demonstrated a more decisive line between the categories of habitual engagement and play, while Shannon described the two as more closely related. Overall, the four main categories for doing art overlap at times for artists, and the degree of experience varies by artist.

Artists' habitually engaged actions are crucial to their processes, particularly for these professionals who have made artwork for many years. This finding is similar to Charmaz's (2014) and Snow's (2007) explanations that people's interpretive processes, as indicated by an internal dialogue, are less explicit when people are familiar with their situations and actions and they know what to expect. During moments of habitual engagement, artists anticipated where they were going with their actions, but with less explicitly self-aware thought than during moments of planning and control. Through routine and habit, artists sometimes predicted where they were going without explicit thought. With habitual engaged actions, artists reproduced conventional artistic aspects of their work that they developed over time through mastery. Once artists encountered an unexpected situation in their art piece, they would then engage in more innovative actions by approaching their piece with play, and judgments.

*c. Play*

The category of play captures artists' less planned and less routinized approaches to their artwork. All twenty artists identified this stage as significant to their actions when creating artwork. Artists said that they relied on moments of play and that this stage was the most exciting for them. Artists provided several different words and phrases to describe this stage of play, such as "discovery," "investigation," "exploration," "organic,"

“free-flowing” and “experimenting.” Leo explained how he viewed and experienced his actions during moments of play:

When I work organically, it means not thinking. It is more about feeling and sensing things that come together or colors that make sense for some reason or textures and shapes and objects that are being removed from their original function and then enter[ing] a space of reclaimed purpose. So that excites me because it takes our ordinary life and gives it a magical spin, in a way. And to work in that way you have to be courageous, because how do you make something that you don't know what you are going to make? You know, it is frustrating, too, to literally get into a state of mind that you could feel your way through something instead of just thinking about. It is what I mean when I say organic. Where it just makes sense in a way that is more intuitive and it enters a more experimenting and free-association, and less ‘Oh well I'm a geometric artist so everything has to fall back and look like my other work,’ and all that shit. No. I try and break those concepts, break those patterns and habits, and try to discover something that I don't know.

Leo demonstrated several characteristics of the play stage in his description. He first identified that he relied less on overt self-conscious thinking and planning. He stated that he worked his way through his art-making in a more intuitive way, which he equates to experimenting. Also, Leo described that play moments are about deviating from habits almost as if through improvisation. Leo described play as the opposite of moments of planning and habitual engagement.

Artists described that experimenting made them feel like they controlled their actions less. By this, artists meant that their actions felt “more in the moment,” as Garret said. Garret also explained:

I try not to let myself have a very pre-planned approach. I like working with spontaneity and letting accidents happen, with keeping in mind that there is a bit of control.

Garret identified that he is the source of the actions but he does not try to expect exactly what will happen and does not anticipate his approach to his work. By not exerting complete control over their actions artists are able to discover something new. Artists

found that they made original and novel changes to their finished product when engaged in play and exerting less control. Artists then learned from these new actions or conventions and added them to their foundational shaping practices to work from later.

Vicky described what play experience meant for her:

I think it means that you don't really have a direction. You have the materials there and it is kind of like free-associating. And you kind of just feel it and you go with it, it is like, you know, one thing might lead you to another thing. And it is not like you are thinking about it or have clear map of what it is you want to do, you know. It is also like a form of when you are a kid and you are playing make believe or whatever it is with your friends, and there is no script. And there is a looseness to it.

Vicky mentioned that she does not have a clear step-by-step idea of where she is going with her actions. She also described that she discovers something new from moment to moment. Moreover, Vicky likened discovery to childlike play, a description also shared by several other artists.

Artists found themselves encountering new situations by approaching their actions without expectations of certain results, similarly to a child making their way through their social and material situations, in which their actions are unpredictable.

Ethan described the play stage for himself:

Well again thinking back to little kids, they don't – they may have some kind of idea in their mind as to what they want it to look like, but you only know when you see it. You know what kids' drawings look like. So, you know, you just try to empty your mind and just play and explore and see what happens when you do things that are unplanned... So, how do you get there? You have no plans, no framework or pathway or whatever, but through play you can kind of create a kind of intuitional way of working, you know.

Ethan portrayed his play stage as similar to that of kids who do not really know where they are going, but instead explore their actions as they go along. When discussing play stage, I often asked artists the followed-up question, "Does it feel like you're approaching

a new situation every time when you create or go into play?” and the artists’ responses were confirmative, with answers like “Yes,” and “Definitely.”

During experimenting and play stages, the participating artists found themselves in new situations that they did not anticipate encountering in their artwork. However, these artists learned to put themselves in a place of discovery without intentionally overthinking what they were doing. The finding of play is similar to improvisation (Nachmanovitch 1990) in that artists felt confident with their skills but made improvised actions in the moment of creating. Professional artists entered and maintained play moments because of their confidence with previously established skills and mastery of artistic conventions. Artists described that during play, their actions were more “intuitive,” as described by Ethan, because they experienced less reflective thinking than moments of planning. Also, artists identify play moments as very important to their art-making process, even to the point that some artists attribute their actions during play as their most creative. Lastly, in approaching art playfully artists identified that they experience pleasure and enjoyment when composing their work.

#### *d. Judgments*

The category judgments represented artists’ in-the-moment decisions when encountering new or problematic situations in composing their art piece. New situations for artists indicated not having a plan for their actions; essentially, they did not know where they are going when creating. However, during judgment moments artists were more explicitly thinking than in play moments, but these artists were not thinking through their actions step-by-step, as they do in planning moments. At this stage, artists experienced explicit thought as in-the-moment questioning while they sought answers to

the new or problematic situation in which they found themselves. Interviewees described solving their problematic or new encounter by making explicit judgments, and from those judgments artists created new meaning, by not necessarily or explicitly relying on conventions, with their thoughts and their subsequent actions. The in-the-moment self-reflexivity that artists demonstrated during judgments reflects pragmatists Charles Peirce (1960) theoretical concept of judgments that recognizes that people give meaning by naming something through discursive thought when trying figure out the unfamiliar. This new meaning is in contrast to artists' reflective thought during planning and control moments, which occurred as a more linear dialogue in which artists moved from step to step. Moreover, artists identified that their use of judgments often resulted in creating something original in their artwork. Creativity as occurring in-the-moment during judgments is in line with George Herbert Mead's (1932, 1938) concept of temporality and Han Joas (1996) theory of situated creativity. Artists overwhelmingly described the significance of using judgments when composing as a frequent and essential component of their processes.

Artists used several different phrases to describe judgment experiences, such as "making decisions," "trial and error," "problem-solving," "form an opinion," and "saying yes or no." James provided an explanation of what judgments meant for him:

It's completely creative, and creative is completely intuitive. You make judgments intuitively. I mean, I talk to myself in the studio, you know, like a crazy person. But it is just so I can bring the thing up and say, 'Do I really want to make this background this dark?' You know, I talk to myself and somebody looks at me and says I'm crazy. But I'm trying to say, 'Hmm do I like that?' [and] it's like that. It's almost never programmatic, even though you start with something. I am an abstract painter; I'm not going to start painting big faces or something that is back too far, that is back to the drawing board. So you always have what you know how to do, more or less. But, at the same time, you are taking that

concept and you're hitting it with ideas. Like my last background too. I don't like the light background, so I started the dark background. Then I sit and think about it, [and] then I do it. The thing is that it is not a very clean process.

In this description, James pointed out several characteristics of judgments. He said he does not have a planned-out approach when applying judgments. He identified that he thought through problems he encountered by talking out loud sometimes. Thus, he uses in the moment discursive self-reflexivity to think through problematic situations. James also discussed that he considers the results of his actions to be original, that he introduces something new during his judgments stage. Thus, his actions and thoughts in response to the unfamiliar resulting as novelty reflects pragmatists concepts of emergence (Mead 1938) and situated creativity (Joas 1996). Lastly, James pointed out that his judgments do not come from nowhere. He said that his judgments, although they felt more intuitive, came from previous learning experiences. Artists' thoughts and decisions, then, stem from their shaping practices. Additionally, other artists in their explanations confirmed the characteristics of judgment moments that James described.

In their discussions of judgment moments, these artists stressed that they do not have a pre-planned approach and compose in the moment, similar to in moments of play, and in contrast to both the planning and habitual engagement stages. Garret described how he experienced making decisive decisions during his artistic process:

I am pretty much in my own thoughts. Not necessarily planning out, but deciding where I am going to lay this mark or where I am going to run the brayer or the roller for this portion. Or how is the solvent that I use going to interact with the ink to create reticulations or atmospheric effects. So while I am doing that, I am definitely conscious of certain things that I am doing. But the process from there to the printing press and the final image, there are things that happen that there is no way I could have predicted. And that I really enjoy.

Garret explained that his use of judgments involved explicit thought and no pre-planned actions. Similar to James, Garret said his thoughts occur in the form of making decisions about where to go with his actions. He described thinking about ways to use his tools and materials while in the moment of creating. Garret also pointed out that he could not predict the results of his actions because they are unexpected for him. When engaged in judgments, artists' treated their situations as unfamiliar or encounter unfamiliar problems from which they solve through new thoughts and/or actions, but they did so by applying modified dispositions from their previous learning. Lastly, Garret pointed out that when encountering new problems he then created novel actions, and he enjoyed those moments the most. This type of enjoyment during the judgment stages is comparable to artists' feelings during play stages. Artists enjoyed the process of taking their artwork to unexpected places and making unanticipated actions in order to create something novel.

Similar to their feelings in play moments, artists felt that when making judgments, they were more likely to make more original choices with their work. Ethan recalled:

Well, for me, especially right now, creative is a lot about problem solving. And, you know, I mean, how do you negotiate your way through something when there are no plans and there [is] maybe some loose framework for solving or reaching a goal, but so how do you get there?

Like Ethan, other artists often identified their creativity as their ability to make decisions in the moment. However, artists described the novelty of their actions not as large contributions but instead as “something a little quirky,” “a little weird,” or “a little bit different,” in the words of Roxie, Tom, and Christopher. In their descriptions of the originality of their art, artists often used the word “little,” denoting that they felt a small input of novelty in their work. The aspect of novelty seems lesser than the use of

conventions because these artists also were involved in planning and habitual engagement from which they made elements more consistent with familiar artistic conventions. During the play and judgments stages, artists tried to add something new and unconventional by applying actions and thoughts in the moment, but this does not constitute the majority of artists' actions when making art.

Artists often described their in-the-moment choices as “natural,” “second nature,” and “instinctual,” as Jason described. But, as James pointed out, an artist's ability to make judgments comes from his or her extensive previous learning, experiences, practices, and mastery over artistic conventions. Christopher said:

There's a lot of trial and error when it comes to what colors will actually work on top of each other. It's funny, at this point, after working with spray paint for over twenty years, a lot of it does feel instinctual. Because people will say, 'Oh my God, you're so good with this and this and this.' You know. I'm like, maybe. I don't know. But I do tend to stop people when they say 'You're so talented.' I'm like, no. I don't think there's necessarily that much talent involved. In a lot of ways, that's kind of a cop out people use for artists. Like I said, I was a kid drawing all the time in class. If I didn't put all those hours in, it wouldn't have shown up. If I hadn't been spray painting for twenty years, it wouldn't show there, either. But as far as me learning new techniques, there are things that work and things that don't. Gosh, it doesn't feel like there's any epiphany. This is what I should've been doing all along.

Christopher described judgments as achieved through years of trial and error and he attributed the outcomes of his decisions to his extensive practice and proficiency in artistic conventions. Even when he felt like his decisive thoughts and actions were natural, he rejected the idea that he made his choices without a learning foundation.

Overall, artists experience a stage in their processes where they think about and make decisions that are not pre-planned or expected. To make judgments, artists mostly used internal reflective thoughts to navigate their actions. Artists attributed some novel aspects of their artistic products to moments of judgments; similar to when they engaged

in play and investigation. Artists also stressed that their decisions felt natural and intuitive; however, they associated their ability to navigate the unexpected with their previous learning and practice of artistic conventions. Thus, artists continued to rely on their shaping practices even when they were not sure where they were going with their actions and when they encountered unfamiliar or problematic situations in their artwork. Through years of experience and practice, artists learned to rely on unplanned moments. Interviewees discussed their unplanned approach as using their abilities to make in-the-moment decisions, which they viewed as possibly leading to original aspects of their art pieces.

Creating art and composing- putting marks on a canvas, carving, drawing, or shaping materials - is a multi-dimensional process in which artists move between different approaches to their thoughts and actions when encountering their materials. The multiple categories of planning and control, habitual engagement, play, and judgments are important for artists to use in order to produce their artwork. Planning and control refers to the stage at which artists systematically think through the actions they anticipate taking to elicit the results they expect. Artists focus in a way that serves as a reflective narrative about their ongoing actions, as if they are having an internal conversation with themselves. Control is the part of artists' approaches that they intentionally apply to their learned skills and techniques, thus having a clear expectation of what the result will be for a particular art piece. Habitual engagement is similar to planning moments in that artists have a clear expectation of the actions they are taking and what they expect their following actions to be. However, the anticipation of their actions stems from the artist's reliance on repetition and habitually formed actions. For example, an artist has made the

same line or shape so many times before that the action of making it becomes familiar. During this stage, artists described experiencing less explicit thoughts. However, artists reported still feeling engaged and focused on their tasks at hand in spite of continually engaging in such routinized practices. Although these artists felt like they moved in a more automatic way, they were not detached from the moment of *doing*. As in the planning stage, artists' actions when habitually engaged were meant to follow and apply previously learned artistic conventions.

Additionally, artists engaged in moments in which they did not plan out their actions, and instead they felt that they made their actions in the immediate moment. Artists described their unplanned approaches as play and judgments. During play moments, artists explained that they discovered something new in their actions when they less consciously controlled or narrated their actions. Artists described not knowing where they were going and not having a plan when engaged in play. Artists felt that the results of their actions during play moments were innovative contributions to their final art products.

Moreover, artists were the most excited about doing art when in play mode. Artists said that when engaged in play they were encountering unfamiliar situations and they likened their actions to those of children who experiment with and explore what they are doing. When artists engaged in judgment moments they felt they did not have a plan of where they were going similar to play moments. However, during judgments artists report having specific thoughts about what they are doing in the moment. Artists described their thoughts in the judgment stage as either a confirmation or a dismissal of certain actions they were taking. Comparable to play, the judgment stage and its

subsequent actions were some of the artists' most novel contributions to their artistic pieces. Lastly, although actions during play and judgments required less self-reflexive monitoring than planning and habitual engagement did, artists still maintained that their actions were rooted in previous learning. Thus, artists' actions rest on shaping practices, whether they intentionally know what they want to do or not.

Furthermore, for artists, the four categories of "doing art" are essential when composing artwork. Planning includes the practical steps that need to be taken, and this approach makes up a large portion of what artists do. Habitual engagement comes from repetitions of actions and an artist's familiarity with where he or she wants to go when creating. Thus, artists follow and reproduce other artists' conventions during planning and habitual engagement. Play is where artists try not to anticipate their actions, and thus, play allows room for new discoveries. Likewise, during the judgment stage, artists use more active self-conscious thoughts, but still they place their actions "in the moment." Thus, they are not anticipating what they will do. Artists associated their most novel and original contributions with their unanticipated actions during moments of play and judgments. Artists described that they would go "in-between" or "back and forth," as described by Vicky, between these multiple approaches when approaching their artwork. Artists said their immediate process for creating art was "unclean," as in the words of James, because of the potential for them to switch between moments of planning and control, habitual engagements, play, and judgments.

#### 4. *Immersion*

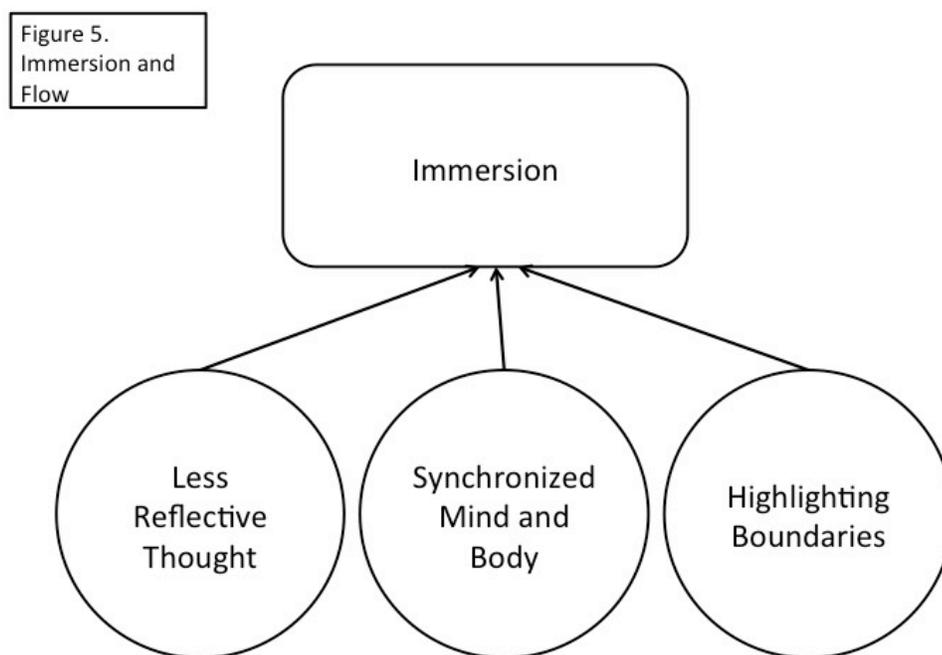
Another phenomenon that artists described when immediately engaged in their work is referred to as *immersion*. When artists are very absorbed in what they are doing,

they experience a sense of flow. For these artists immersion is often similar to the concept of a flow state (Csikszentmihalyi 1997), which is characterized by seemingly effortless actions, less reflective thought in the moment of the activity at hand, feelings of confidence, losing track of time, and experiencing increased feelings of enjoyment. When immersed in their actions of composing artists interviewed described experiencing all of the characteristics of a flow state. Many of the artists of the study described moments when composing as being intensely “in the moment,” and also as “zoning out.” Artists recounted that they became absorbed in their immediate activity through a quieting of the narration, or step-by-step thought process, in their mind. Although, artists felt that getting into immersed states was difficult, but also felt that these moments were particular special and pleasurable.

Additionally, artists reported that they continued to apply their shaping practices, such as learned technique and body motions during flow, in a way that was comparable to that of play and judgment moments. Artists learned to enter a flow moment by intently focusing and concentrating on the task at hand. Artists figured out how to get into flow because of their experiential learning, deliberate practice, and mastery of various skills and techniques. Confidence of skills, customary practices, and conventions often was identified as strengthening artists flow states. Artists also reported discussing and sharing their experiences of “being in the zone,” as described by Howie, with other artist friends and colleagues.

Immersion is organized as a separate theme because although seventeen of twenty total artists who participated in this study described experiencing flow when immediately making actions for creating artwork, they did not engage in flow as consistently and as

frequently as they did in the other approaches (planning, habitual engagement, play, and judgments). Also, artists portrayed flow as a special occurrence, and some artists, depending on their use of materials and techniques, did not experience flow at all when making art. Immersion means the artists lost themselves in the process of making the piece, and descriptions such as being “in the zone,” is akin to flow, meaning artists felt that their minds and their actions were synchronized. Also, consistent with flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi 1997), artists reported increased enjoyment and the loss of time when experiencing absorption in the task at hand. A visual representation of the conceptual theme of flow and its related categories is provided below in Figure 5.



*a. Less Reflective Thought*

Artists felt that they experienced less reflective thought when experiencing flow moments. This characteristic of less explicit thought when making actions was similar to

artists' states of mind during play and habitual engagement. Edith, a sculptor, recalled that while immersed in creating she feels that her self-awareness "dissolves away."

Shannon, a mixed media artist, said:

If I focus on these lines here, shapes come forward. Focus on these lines and not those lines. Certain shapes come forward. And then I start to see relationships of shapes. And in that moment, I'm quiet. I'm calm. I'm usually very focused onto what I'm doing. I don't often hear or see the things happening around me, as it turns out.

Shannon described that she was so focused on her lines and shapes she lost awareness of her surroundings. Several other artists also discussed the importance of flow in order to feel absorbed in the moment. Howie said, "The more you focus, the more you get into that zone."

Also, Shannon recalled that she is "in the moment" when experiencing a quieting in her mind. The participating artists commonly described immersion as a quieting of the mind, which means artists experienced less reflective thought. Tom said, "I don't really think when I'm doing art." Similarly, Jason, a painter and sculptor, described the experience of immersion as, "...second nature, it just takes over. I guess it is just meditation. It is doing without thinking." Jason explained that he just *does* without the necessity of thinking through his actions during flow. Several other artists also related the lack of reflective thought to meditation, which is characteristic of the quieting of the mind. Howie, a painter and performance artist, described how he enters and experiences flow states:

In terms of getting in the zone to go back to your question, I think it's about getting quiet, you know? And letting stuff come up. You know whether it is a formal practice, or meditation, or informal unconscious one, getting to that quiet place where things can come up –intuitive knowledge is probably the entrance point to the zone.

Similar to Jason, Howie described being in the zone as quiet and meditative. Also, Howie made reference to “knowledge” as way to start getting into the zone. Paul, a graffiti artist and painter, explained that getting into the zone comes from “confidence.” The previous description by Jason demonstrates that his learned actions and sculpting and painting skills shaped what he was doing because he felt like his actions were effortless. These various descriptions subtly show that although action in flow occurred without explicit reflective thought, those actions are a product of practice and familiarity with the artist’s craft. Artists confidently drew upon their knowledge of their shaping practices to make art even when immersed in composing.

*b. Synchronized Mind and Body*

Artists reported that the unison between their focused and confident thoughts and their previously learned skills and conventions made it possible for their actions to feel seamless. Interviewees felt that their seemingly effortless actions in their mind over their creative process expressed the characteristics of both their honed skills and their capacity to create the unexpected. Also, artists interviewed often described synchronization as embodied by referring to the unison of the mind and physical actions. As graffiti artist Austin explained:

I think just going to a wall or a napkin or a notebook with nothing planned sometimes - just all in your mind - that it is just the best. It comes out the best that way. I know other people work differently, and I appreciate that, too. And the actual process of doing sometimes it’ll be so mesmerizing that you forget what you are getting into... And I have heard from other people and other artist[s] that I have talked to that’s when they feel most complete: when they know what they are doing and they are executing. They are executing it and everything is just kind of falling into place and you just stop thinking about it completely and you are just doing it. And they feel like they fall into some weird kind of state, I guess.

Austin described approaching his work without a plan but with at least a basic idea of how to use conventions. However, he said that while executing his actions in the moment, there is a feeling of completeness, and there is the experience of not reflectively thinking. Austin mentioned that while in this state artists' actions are successful and "fall into place." Austin's description illustrates that the flow state is a syncing of the mind (as manifested by learned skills and knowledge) and body (as manifested by actions) in which artists engage in less reflective thought and artists felt they produce successful creative results. In general, flow states are the complete application of an artist's mastered artistic skills and knowledge experienced as "in-the-moment" actions. Furthermore, Austin demonstrated the social aspect of learning to get into flow by sharing and communicating about his experiences learning from others. Lastly, in Austin's description, he also highlighted that not every artist works using flow or immersion.

In contrast to play, when artists did not know where they were going, in immersion, artists felt very confident in what they were doing. During play, artists' actions were unexpected but they were more about discovery and exploration. While in flow, artists' actions were both expected and unexpected. Paul described his actions in flow in the following way:

And then there is the other side of our work, which is like this (points at his painting), where I am not really thinking about what I am doing so much and [I] just kind of dive into it, and like free flowing. And, you know, I have [a] handle on the aesthetic, but I don't really know what I am doing, exactly. I don't have a plan, and that is what I like the most because it then becomes something original and extremely unique, and I like the intricacy of it.

Paul explained several characteristics of the flow stage. He said he does not really think, but he does have control over his skills and over the way he applies his artistic

conventions. He does not, however, act with a plan. Moreover, Paul views the result of actions derived from flow as original contributions to his painting. The artists who experienced flow states often described the results as the successful execution of their creative skills in following convention and in innovating. A characteristic of flow is that people experience an optimal integration of their mental and physical activities, which can result in superior performance (Nideffer 2002).

Distinctively for artists during flow, the unison of their learned practices and their in-the-moment actions results in novelty or innovation, which the artists referred to as “happy accidents,” in the words of Shannon. As Bradley explained:

There are always moments of success and there are always moments of surviving, and other days it doesn't work out... But the challenge is, in the meantime, what is good and what is not. Basically, if it is good art, it will surprise me. The work will try to teach me.

Bradley showed that what he considers good and successful in his artwork is the aspects he made which surprised him, the unexpected results of his actions as novelty.

Artists described during flow the optimal application of their skills, but without reliance on step-by-step reflection of their movements. Just as in the habitual engagement stage, in flow, artists would make successful elements of their artwork in which they deliberately followed conventions. However, unlike habitual engagement, during immersion artists also added unintended elements to their artwork similar to play. Thus, during flow states, artists reported unison of their actions and intentions in a focused and confident way that brought about successful unexpected results when composing. Artists recalled very positive feelings about unexpected results in their work because they viewed such results as novel and original. As Garret said, “There are things that happen that there is no way I could have predicted. And that I really enjoy.”

*c. Highlighting Boundaries*

Highlighting boundaries refers to the limits of immersion and flow for these participants. Artists who experience flow described their own boundaries for reaching a flow state. Artists were able to get into the zone sometimes, but not always, and flow is not *necessary* for them to successfully create their artwork. Also, three interviewees did not describe experiencing flow states at all. These three professional artists had different procedures and goals in their art-making processes than the other artists.

Reaching a flow state of mind does not come easily, and at times artists may not be able to utilize immersion while making their artwork. The artists who did experience flow talked about entering the zone as a “messy” process in which they found themselves not always maintaining a flow state. The back and forth quality of coming in and out immersion for artists’ means that this level of experience is not something they are always able to tap into when doing art. As Paul recalled:

It’s really a combination of confidence and a certain amount of accomplishment you feel as it is starting to materialize... And so you just take a few more risks that you would not normally take, and you feel like you are in a zone because it’s like, ‘I can’t do that all the time.

Paul illustrated that he has to find the right balance of confidence and risk taking, and that he can’t get into the zone every time he creates art. Thus, flow is viewed as a special approach to composing for an artist’s creative process.

One illustrator, one mixed-medium artist, and another painter of realistic portraits using spray paint on canvas-sized surfaces did not describe experiencing flow moments. These are highly sought-after professional artists, just like the other participants in this study; in other words, these three artists are no less successful or prominent than the others. However, these three artists have particular patterns and procedures in their craft,

which either involve overwhelming technique or a process of repetition. An example is Christopher, a spray painter who makes realistic portraits. In contrast to the traditional use of spray paint on walls, Christopher's pieces use spray paint on a small canvas to create precise realistic portraiture. The challenge of applying his medium and technique on such an unconventional space means he is constantly reflecting and controlling every action he makes with the spray paint. Spray paint is not an easily manipulated medium: each burst of spray is permanent. Thus, immersion is not useful for Christopher because he makes detailed realistic portraits with a less flexible medium in smaller spaces; indeed, his challenging technique means he engaged in an extremely demanding procedure. Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) explained that flow does not occur when the challenge of an activity is so high that the person cannot engage in some moments of effortless, immersive action.

Another boundary to flow states for artists comes from too much boredom when making their artwork. April, an illustrator, did not describe experiencing flow. Unlike many of the other artists, April described her process as very planned and repetitive. April often does design work and does not spend as much time "investigating" when creating her work. However, artists who talked about flow experiences also discussed when flow moments did not occur for them. As Roxie recalled:

Well, first of all, it depends on how planned out the painting is. If it is really planned out, then it really is like going through the motions of doing it. If I know exactly how I want it and those paintings are kind of boring for me. And, incidentally, they [those paintings] seem to be everybody's favorites because they are the most resolved and all of that. But they are boring; it is just like paint by number. You know, I know exactly what texture is going to go here, what color and what form.

Roxie demonstrated that when her piece is too planned out she feels bored and does not experience immersion. She described her process in those instances as more mechanical

and predictable, both of which are boundaries to flow. However, Roxie's statement points out that with her very planned pieces, although she does not experience immersion, she received positive praise by her peers. Thus, a flow state is not necessary for a more positive social reception, even though many artists in the study felt that their actions during flow were exciting and novel.

Finally, the mixed-media artist that did not describe entering a state of immersion was the only artist in the sample to rely on a process of division of labor with an assistant. The artist delegated very planned out tasks to her assistant and she herself did not describe using an unplanned approach when composing her artwork. Selma described herself as a "control freak," and spent a lot of time designing her pieces. Her primary way to create was by constantly think about every step of the project in consideration of her assistant and herself, thus it is unlikely she would entered a state of absorption in-the-moment. Immersion when described by other artists requires a quieting of the mind and a letting go of pre-planned actions in order to get into a meditative state. The use of division of labor highlights another boundary to immersion.

At times, artists will rely on some approaches such as planning or play more so than at other times. Artists use various approaches as a means of accomplishing their intentions, goals, and personal fulfillments when creating artwork. Most interviewees used planning, habitual engagement, plays, judgments, and immersion to some extent. However, there was no evidence that one approach to composing was a better approach than another in terms of the reception of an artist's work when comparing different artistic processes.

To summarize immersion moments Vicky provided an example of how she felt when asked about being “in the zone”:

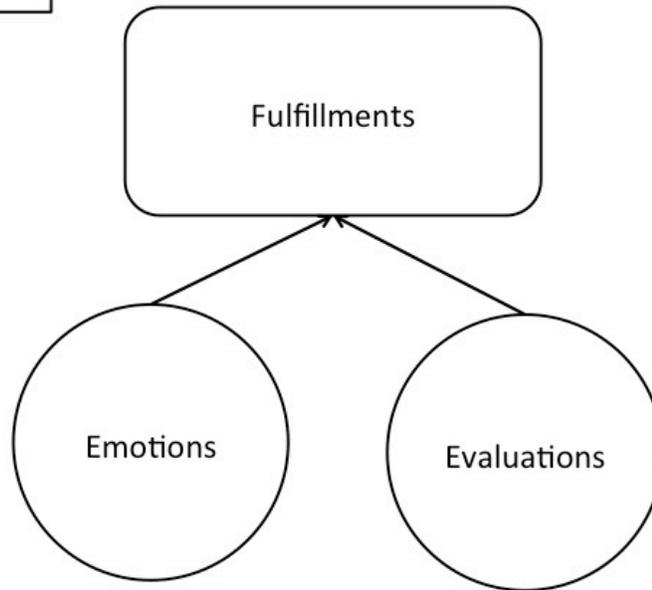
I am having, like, chills. I talk about this with my other artist friends. We talk about this stuff. And there are certain points where you are so in the zone your body is all like - I don't want to sound all hokey or anything - but it is almost like your whole body is a medium and [it] is, like, the channel through which all this stuff is coming. And it is like, where is this all coming from? You know, you don't think about it while you are doing it, but when you step back you see whatever it is you have done and there have been ten hours that could have gone by. It is very exciting. And just talking about it makes me want to get back into it... And once you get into the groove of it and you're so focused, all the other stuff falls away and it is kind of meditative.

Vicky explained several characteristics of flow. First, Vicky described that she shared her experience with her peers; thus, her practice is confirmed by her social interactions. Next, she felt that she painted at an optimal skill level and positively surprised herself with the results of her artwork. Other artists, like Vicky, associated their experience of flow as special to their process and product. Moreover, Vicky mentioned that she got into zone moments by focusing, and, like other artists, by relating this experience to a meditative state, which signifies a feeling of ease about her actions and a lessening of her reflective thoughts. Furthermore, Vicky, like the other artists, described a distinguishing feature of flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1997): the loss of time when absorbed in the flow stage. Vicky, like other artists interviewed, identified their body as important when in immersion, thus reflecting an embodied approach to composing. Lastly, Vicky described her excitement about and enjoyment of her flow states, which is further consistent with other artists' descriptions. Lastly, boundaries to immersion occurred when an artists' engagement in their activity at hand was either too challenging or too boring, also supportive of Csikszentmihalyi (1997) theory of flow.

### *5. Fulfillments*

The final theme for professional visual artists' processes involves the contexts in which they perceive or feel fulfillment by making artwork. Fulfillments are threaded throughout all of the previous themes. The types of fulfillments outlined from artists of the study experiences are a continuum of emotions, personal and social evaluations, and detachment from their art piece. Although each artist experienced fulfillments throughout his or her process, the fulfillments theme is organized at the end of the model for two reasons. First, those emotions and feedback experienced by artists reinforced their interest in making artwork and informed their shaping practices. For example, artists can strengthen the contexts of processes through enjoyment when crafting or when they receive praise from others. Also, when artists experience frustration when working through unexpected problems their new solutions to those challenges can become incorporated in their learning foundation. A visual representation of the conceptual theme of fulfillments and related categories is provided below in Figure 6.

Figure 6.  
Fulfillments



*a. Continuum of Emotions*

Artists identified a range of emotions throughout their process. Artists interviewed often-experienced excitement, deep enjoyment, frustration, boredom, and feelings of catharsis when learning, conceiving, and composing their artwork. Artists learned described feelings of enjoyment with others when learning art during childhood, elation when learning through the experience of doing, and catharsis from lived moments or in their everyday worries. During mastery and development, artists explicitly felt excitement when they explored and worked with new or multiple materials and media, when then they reacted to improvements in their skill from deliberate practice, and when finding visual inspirations. Overall, all of the artists interviewed described doing art as “fun.” When composing, artists recalled emotions of fun and pleasure that resulted in

creative results during approaches such as play, and flow. Artists often described these stages as the most exciting stages of their processes. However, during planning and control stage artists had many emotions such as anticipation, to frustration, and tedium. Moreover, artists reported diverging emotions as during habitual engagement when some felt continued excitement and other felt stuck in the monotony of their process. As Marie summarized, “Yeah all emotions, it’s frustrations, excitement, anxiety, and everything. But in the end it is all worth it. You love what you are doing.”

Overall, artists discussed their art-making processes as enjoyable and fun. The fulfillments from their creative process were a reason that these participating artists pursued art careers. Artists’ enjoyment also came from the challenges of making novel aspects of their work, and the process of communicating with others through their visual art piece. As Shannon said, “Really more than anything, it’s [art-making is] just fun. It’s just enjoyable.”

However, artists’ emotions consisted of frequent frustration, stress, and anxiety. Artists repeatedly related their process to a regular job and described feelings of anxiety and at times feelings of monotony. As Christopher said:

It's just a matter of some days I just really enjoy the process. It's funny, it's almost like I have to remind myself, ‘Yeah, I really do enjoy this.’ Because it can feel like a job at times, and it is. It's tough.

Although, when artists talked about the practical frustrations, they also confirmed that they still very much like making art, and this fulfillment seems to outweigh the difficult times. Jason and Edith called their process “hell,” but after the work was done, they both reflected back and felt very good about it. As Bradley explained:

Doing painting is not mythical. Everyone says, ‘Painting – oh, you must be so free and flowing.’ It is not. It is just work. It is work that suits me and I like it a lot and it is a good state of being for me.

Bradley emphasized both the struggles and the pleasurable aspects of painting for him. Moreover, every artist in the sample said that there is nothing more he or she would like to do as a career other than make art.

Several artists said what they most enjoyed was their process as investigation and discovery and when then their composing resulted in making something original and unique. Often, artists' heightened enjoyment arose during moments of immersion; Vicky and Paul referred to flow as "exciting," "special," and "addictive." Also, during their interviews, the artists demonstrated visibly increased excitement when talking about their experiences with flow. Vicky said she got goose bumps while talking about her experience of being in the zone. Other artists described being immersed in their moment of creating and characterized it as "mesmerizing" and "meditative." Edith said she got "lost" when working on her sculptures. Feelings of pleasure and enjoyment are a distinguishing characteristic of flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1997).

In general, most of the artists expressed that at some point in their process they felt relief from their everyday worries. Austin, a graffiti artist, said that he felt like spray-painting was "stress relief." Selma and Howie called their processes "cathartic" and "therapeutic." Marie explained:

It's like escape. And it's work: if you're a serious artist, it's work. It's not like you're painting and then you go do something else. It really helps to alleviate all the worries, all the sad days, sad moments... Well, I think you feel that you are doing something good and that makes you feel better. I think it has to do with doing something with your hands. We are kind of losing this age [of creating with our hands]. And doing something with your hands, creating something, producing, fabricating something and using your hands is, I think, therapeutic for anyone.

Marie referred to her art-making as an escape from her worries. But, like previous statements by artists, Marie's words still emphasize that art-making is a lot of work. Yet,

in general Marie felt that the process of creating and using her hands made her feel good. Tom similarly described working with physical materials as “sensual.” Artists overwhelmingly reported feeling like their worries or burdens were momentarily lifted when they were creating. Artists viewed their processes as a source of gratification and relief.

*b. Personal and Social Evaluations*

Another source of fulfillment for artists was evaluations of their final product. Artists interviewed explained that they frequently judged and assessed their own work throughout their process. Artists’ evaluation of their work occurred as an assessment of their successful application of conventions and customary practices, self-expressive feeling of accomplishment when composing, and the degree of originality of their work. Also, when artists present their work to others they received both critical and supportive feedback. Feedback often occurs when presenting their work as a finished piece as in the example of graduate student critiques, but also happens when artists show their piece in progress to peers, friends, and other people within their networks.

Personal evaluation of created work occurs throughout the art-making process from conceiving to presenting, but artists interviewed often discussed their feeling of assessment when composing. For example Shannon recalled:

There is a long period in the process of just that is looking at it [the art piece]. I’ll leave it on the table and I’ll just walk by it for days without outwardly doing anything. There’s a lot of internal process.

Shannon’s description shows that one way she evaluates her work in progress is by not directly interacting with the piece for several days, but internally evaluating how she feels about the work. She elaborated that she assessed her reactions to the work in progress as a feeling or judgment of what she considers good or bad. Similarly other artists described

leaving works in progress for a few days in order to better consider how they felt about the piece. Marie said she would feel “overwhelmed” when making a piece and she needed distance for her work. Leo recounted:

I like to work alone. I like to spend days and nights here [at the studio] and zone out. And then I come back the next day and I'll be like ‘what happened?’ Yeah at night I thought it was good and then I come back and realize it looks terrible. Or the opposite will happen where I think ‘Oh I'll put that aside it's not going anywhere.’ Then I'll wait a minute and realize there is something there.

Leo's description showed that his perception and assessment of his work could be based on his impression, which also could change. Artists' personal evaluations frequently occurred from the context of their own self-expression as feelings toward their art.

Additionally, evaluations of artists' finished work occurred when they presented it to others. The graduate students interviewed discussed that showing their artwork to peers during critiques was useful for feedback about the executions of their technical skills and conceptual ideas. Many artists talked about the importance of positive feedback from their family and peers when they were young as motivation to continue making art. In general, social responses are helpful to artists. As Shannon said, “I see the positive feedback that I get so it encourages me more.” For artists that create public installations and murals, social encouragement was particularly important. As Marie stated:

I really enjoy it [making art] more when the work is for a public space where more people are going to enjoy it and interact with it. And when it's for a gallery, I don't know, it's okay. But it's not the same feeling. It's not the same satisfaction.

Examples of the way that artists enjoyed and felt good about their crafting are found in early shaping practices, mastery and development, doing art, immersion, and positive response to the work upon completion of the artistic piece. Fulfillments were an part of

artists' processes when making artwork that informed their continued interest, and use of conventions and novelty for their future work.

### *Conclusion*

The findings analyzed and organized from the descriptions provided by South Florida professional visual artists are provided in a process model of how artists go about making their artwork. First, artists build a foundation of shaping practices from which they become skilled in artistic conventions through social and experiential learning. Shaping practices are the foundations from which artists develop their skills and then they think and act upon these when actually doing art. Shaping practices are important to recognize because visual artists' immediate art-making is done alone, however artists still interact with a social context. Thus, despite creating their work on their own, artists continue to draw on the social symbolic learning that they internalized, and then they act upon that learning by recreating shared meaning through mastering and applying artistic conventions. Additionally, these artists' self-described processes demonstrated the many ways in which people create new meaning and actions, as distinguished by their continuous execution of original aspects to their artwork. Artists of the study demonstrated how people both reproduce and reinvent shared social meaning.

## Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion

The major findings presented in the previous chapter are examined in the relation to Howard Becker's (1982) framework of art worlds and Herbert Blumer's (1969) three-pronged conceptualization of symbolic interactionism. Then discussed is the potential opportunities for future research prompted by this study. Specifically, findings are considered in the context of key concepts of Becker's art worlds, such as cooperative networks, shared cultural texts. Also, the three main principles of SI are referred to as (1) interactive determinism, (2) symbolization, and (3) emergence (Snow 2001) are discussed in consideration of Kathy Charmaz (1980) and David Snow's (2001) extensions. The specific topics for this chapter are *Interacting with Artistic Conventions*, *Internalizing and Acting Out Conventions*, and *Engaging Novelty*. These topics represent an organization of the grounded theory findings of *shaping practices, development and mastery, doing art, immersion, and fulfillments*, but do so in a broader context.

The term art worlds refers to the artistic conventions that emerge as a result of collective interaction between artists, audiences, and consumers of art (including curators, patrons, and viewers). The conventions of art worlds mainly consist of commonly used raw materials, tools and technologies, cultural texts, customary practices, and the values and rewards of art (Becker 1982). Artists use art worlds to form habits in the context of shared meanings, and they do this by interacting with people and materials within cooperative social networks. For example, some artists described adhering to "the rules" of art, as in the example of color theory: they developed routine use of colors that conform to convention. Artists then, know what to expect from when handling materials because of considerable practice, which results in habitual behaviors. Lastly, artists' learn

from their own active interpretations of conventions, such as when making original and novel aspects to their artwork.

### *Interacting with Artistic Conventions*

The foundation for an artist's process is built through learned artistic conventions and through social and experiential interactions. Artists first construct a basis of customary practices and cultural texts (Becker 1982) as shared points of reference within a collective. The various types of social interactions captured in the theme *shaping practices* reflect the coordination of behavior and conventions within the context of the art worlds of the artists in the study. Thus, artists' processes exemplify Herbert Blumer's (1969) second principle of symbolic interactionism – interactive determinism – the tenet that “the meaning of things arises out of social interactions with others” (p. 3). The social influence for any given artist in this study consists mainly of their networks of family members, friends, teachers, mentors, and peers. Artists gain access to art-making through these webs of relationships within their art worlds, and they continue to modify their cultural texts as those interactions change and shift. Thus, artists' processes also are illustrative of Charmaz's (1980) elaboration that the formation of shared meaning is a “continually emerging” process (p. 25). Cooperative networks are the interactional context in which artists build the foundation of their *shaping practices* for making artwork. Furthermore, artists interviewed engaged with shared meanings (artistic conventions) through the use of materials and tools, and it is from here that they acquired experiential knowledge.

The artists involved in this study were initially introduced to art through supportive networks when they were young. For example, family members gave artists

access to artistic materials such as paints, brushes, and canvases and, in some cases, even furnished them with the physical space in which they could create. Most of the artists in the study thought of their parents or grandparents as their first art teachers. They consistently mentioned the availability and array of art supplies and brought up the opportunities they had to practice using these materials and tools. Many of the artists described art-making as their favorite childhood activity, saying that they spent as much time as they could drawing or painting. These early experiences reflect Dewey and Bentley's (1949) concept of experiential knowledge: these artists took practical and tacit actions when learning to make artwork. Here, artists learn from interacting with other people and with materials and tools of art, and also from the actually composing art (or, in pragmatist terms, by taking action). Thus, interviewees' responses revealed their artistic learning to be both social and experiential. Additionally, in the early stages of making art with family members, and by receiving encouragement from these family members, these artists learn to enjoy the art-making process. Numerous artists interviewed also reflected on receiving praise for their artwork by friends and peers, in addition to close family members. Thus, artists are taught the values and rewards of making artwork through interactional contexts.

The finding of *shaping practices* grounded in social interactions supports the principle of interactive determination demonstrating that “neither individual or society nor self or other are ontologically prior but exist only in relation to each other,” (Snow 2001:369). Since artistic knowledge of conventions is acquired through cooperative networks, the shared meaning or cultural context of an art world constitutes the coordinated behavior among artists. Thus, artists build their social-experiential

foundation (upon which they rely when making artwork) in conjunction with the reliable and continuous social structure of their respective art worlds.

During formal schooling and through mentors, these artists reported learning the customary practices for creating art. Interacting with teachers, professors, peers, and mentors provide the artists with an abundance of information about customary practices and artistic conventions. Moreover, through school programs and mentors, artists accessed materials and tools for making artwork. For example, for a painter, these materials would include different types of paints, canvases, gel media, and resins; painters' tools included brushes, cloths to wipe, and palette knives. Several artists described their initiation to using new materials and tools originating from members of their cooperative networks, such as spouses or peers.

Additionally, when artists receive feedback from people in their art worlds when presenting their finished products, such as during graduate school critiques, they continue to add to their socio-experiential foundations. Even after their formal schooling concluded, these artists, through interactions with peers, curators, and audiences of their artwork, learned from social interactions in consideration of their *shaping practices*. *Shaping practices* exemplify Charmaz's point that acquiring shared meaning is an ongoing and dynamic process; people are constantly modifying their socio-experiential foundations and adding new knowledge, based upon which they will interpret and act. Moreover, artists engage in a process of interpretively selecting which artistic conventions to build into their *shaping practices*. For example, when artists evaluated their own work, they deemed aspects of their product as either successful or unsuccessful in light of their own understanding of artistic convention. Thus, artists' eventual feelings

of satisfaction with or rejection of the results of their work ultimately informs their *shaping practices*. Consequently, artists' creative processes are cyclical and reciprocal in that themes such as *shaping practices* and *fulfillments* often lead into one another.

In terms of symbolic interactionism, artists are socialized into conventions of art-making through their fields of interaction. Artists may create their pieces on their own in their personal studio spaces, but they rely upon their social learning when thinking about and creating their artwork. The classic explanation of socialization by George Herbert Mead (1934) is that a person (particularly during childhood) learns what behaviors and actions to take first by practicing social expectations until these practices become so familiar that he or she develops the ability to anticipate other people's conduct. Artists, then, become socialized in the convention of their art world by developing their *shaping practices*, meaning that they become familiar with the expectation of art-making through their continuous interactions with their cooperative networks and by their lived experiences. *Shaping practices* are fundamentally artists' internalizations and interpretations of the conventions within their respective art worlds.

Over time, an artist's socialization into artistic conventions becomes habitual and routine. The artist's thoughts and actions become more predictable during the creative process. Habitual engagement represents the point at which the use of conventions becomes so routinized that the artist's actions feel natural and effortless. Habitual engagement is an example of the extent to which artists can master and internalize the social conventions of art-making. Thus, although an artist's creative process is commonly viewed as internal, isolated, and individualistic, the findings of this study demonstrate that the foundation from which an artist works is socio-experiential.

Additionally, the concept of socialization in the symbolic interactionist perspective recognizes people as actively involved in the process of figuring out what to do next. Symbolic interactionists and pragmatists emphasize that a person actively interprets their socialization process by internalizing what they consider to be most useful and successful. The artists involved in this study reported that they often put themselves in new situations when creating by working with new media, materials, or tools, as seen in themes of both *development and mastery* and *doing art*. Thus, the artists put themselves into states of active interpretation by playing with and practicing new ways of working when creating. An essential part of an artist's process is learning and practicing new conventions. A continuous process of new socialization kept professional artists extending their skills and mastery.

Lastly, the practical experience of *doing art* is essential for engaging with artistic conventions. Artists in the sample emphasized experience with art-making as a significant way that they developed familiarity with art-making. Art-making requires actual experience, even though some knowledge about convention comes from shared knowledge in books and verbal discourse, and from looking at artwork and visual inspirations as outlined in the findings. Also, knowledge about conventions comes from use of the physical body and by way of interactions with objects for art. The use of the physical body, mostly gestures and control with the hand, is a way that artists described mastering technique, as well as their use of various media and tools of the visual arts. Visual artists (excluding their digital composing) work with physical objects and, as a result, the actual handling of these materials is essential for learning. Training by way of practical experience is a type of experiential knowledge for visual artists. Experiential

knowledge is a central tenet of pragmatist thought emphasized by John Dewey and Arthur Bentley (1949). Visual artists are a population that clearly exemplifies the importance of practically-oriented knowledge acquired through experience with engaging in activities and learning from them. Thus, experiential knowledge comprised a significant part of artists' *shaping practices* when learning conventions.

The theme of *shaping practices* in the conceptual model of the findings is represented as the largest theme, and serves as the foundation for the rest of an artist's process. *Shaping practices* represent both the social and experiential processes for acquiring socially constructed knowledge of artistic convention. *Shaping practices* are the basis from which artists developed their mastery over their creative process; artists draw upon their social knowledge and experience when creating on their own in their studios during the stages of planning, habitual engagement, play, judgments, and *immersion* and *fulfillments*. Additionally, *shaping practices* are the root of the recursive creative process for artists because as artists interpret, modify, and reinvent the conventions of their art worlds, these changes eventually informed and become part of their socio-experiential foundation.

Hence, artists learn about making art through social interactions with others and through their own practical experiences of making art. Once artists develop habits in the form of mastery over conventions and become familiar with shared meaning, they have built a social-experiential foundation. This foundation enables artists to anticipate the situation of approaching their canvas or project. Artists draw upon the knowledge of customary practices and cultural texts that make up their *shaping practices* when they actually make their decisions and take action. As Becker (1982) points out, once an artist

learns conventions, their choices are already limited by those conventions. An example of when artists clearly apply customary practices is during the planning and control stages. For instance, an artist thinks through the practical aspects of making a painting, such as balancing objects and mixing colors, and then makes decisions accordingly. Thus, artists' learning and engagement in shared meaning with their art world results in the reproduction of conventions when they make their visual art pieces. For instance, one way that these artists reflected the influence of cultural texts is when they said they like to incorporate the wider culture of South Florida, such as the art scene at Wynwood or the "attitude" of Miami (in Xander's words), into their artwork. However, it is important to remember that these social interactions are influential both ways: whether these artists are interacting with other people or with physical materials, they are essentially co-creating meaning and convention with their actions. Essentially, the artists in the study also influence the wider culture and/or the customary practices of their art worlds through their interactions and their shared visual works. This influence will be discussed in more detail in the forthcoming section, *Engaging Novelty*.

#### *Internalizing and Acting Out Conventions*

Artists' processes for making artwork demonstrate the ways in which people internalize and act on shared cultural texts of meaning. Although artists make art mostly alone, they still draw upon their social-experiential learning. For example when artists think and engage in internal monologue, they are internally reflecting on social knowledge about art by using shared language. Also, when artists imagine other people's possible reactions to their artwork, they anticipate and apply shared meanings reflexively. Artists internalize conventions when they advance their goals, because they intend to

communicate a specific idea or meaning with their finished art piece. Moreover, when artists deliberately increase their practice they use their knowledge of artistic conventions to work towards mastery, to the point that they can then experience habitual engagement. Furthermore, when artists use practice and repetition of gestures to master artistic conventions, they demonstrate how the body interacts with and manifests social learning, and this results in embodied knowledge.

Artists' processes, then, illustrate Blumer's (1969) principle of symbolization, that "people act toward things on the basis of meaning they give them," (p. 3) and Kathy Charmaz's (1980) extension of the principle that, "meanings are interpreted through shared language and communication" (p. 25). Symbolization is the core tenet of SI because "symbols and the meanings" conveyed, "are often, perhaps routinely embedded in and reflective of existing cultural and organizational contexts and systems of meaning" (Snow 2001:371). For the artists of this study, symbolization is the way in which the cultural texts and artistic conventions they have enveloped into their *shaping practice* become taken for granted and habitual. The social process that enables the routinization of meaning for visual artists is the web of relationships and interactions within their cooperative networks, and their interpretive process in which they select successful and useful customary practices. Thus, symbolization for artists is the internalization of and action based on routinized meaning. In this vein, art worlds represent a system of meaning for an artist that is seemingly consistent and reliable. Thus, for this study, symbolization constitutes the social structure of an artist's creative process, meaning the context of coordinated social behavior, which the artist considers when using conventions, customary practices, and cultural texts.

One way that the artists of the study demonstrated their own processes of symbolization was through language. The artists reported that when they experienced internal reflection as language, they explicitly applied socially shared meaning. Language is at the heart of social interaction because language represents the practical way people make a situation, object, and experience known (Mead [1934] 1969). When a person in his or her own self-conscious reflection uses language, he or she engages in social conventions. During the planning and control stages, artists used explicit self-reflection in the form of an internal monologue. When artists thought about their actions, they actively drew on their social-experiential *shaping practices*. Thus, their interpretations of conventions are explicitly experienced through the internalization of shared conventions. For example, during the planning stage, Shannon described thinking about a certain linoleum-carving tool that she learned to use in one of her college courses. During the control stage, Shannon was actively thinking about how close to the edge of her linoleum block print she wanted to cut her line because she knew from previous experience that the ink would bleed along the edge in a specific spot.

Shannon's thinking during planning and applying control took shape in her mind as words and reflected what she learned during her practices. Words in the process of reflexivity indicate language as meaning and context; for an artist that meaning and context are among the learned artistic conventions of his or her art world. Thus, this type of internal conversation supports Charmaz's (1980) emphasis that people assign meaning to things in the context of language. Moreover, explicit reflection, as demonstrated by an internal conversation, represents an artist's active interpretation because he or she is learning something new and attempting to internalize it. Pragmatists and symbolic

interactionists emphasize that reflectively thinking about one's actions is more explicit when one has not formed habitual behaviors in relation to a situation (Charmaz 1991; Dewey [1938] 1991; Peirce 1960; Snow 2001).

However, for Shannon, there was a point that she reached after years of mastery where she no longer necessarily thought so explicitly about how close to make her lines to the edge of the linoleum block. She described reaching a point of habitual engagement at which, although she clearly was concentrating on what she was doing, she also made decisions and took action without the necessity of step-by-step reflective thought. For artists, the stage of *development and mastery* is significant for forming regular actions in response to familiar situations that result in habitual engagement. Artists develop this type of predictable and familiar approach for making their artwork through deliberate practice over time which leads to experience. Developing familiar actions over time is a primary characteristic of pragmatist John Dewey's ([1922] 2012) theory of habits, which is similar to the symbolic interactionist concept of habitual practices (Charmaz 1980; Snow 2001).

Habitual engagement represents another type of internalized shared meaning in which artists have mastered conventions to the point of forming routinized habit. At this point, artists are so familiar with the art-making process and its materials and tools that they create art in a way that feels automatic. Habitual engagement is similar to pragmatist Dewey's ([1922] 2012) concept of habits, and symbolic interactionist Snow's (2001) principle of symbolization, where meaning and actions are internalized to the point that the person's behavior in a given situation becomes predictable. And, as Shannon stressed in her description of habitual engagement, using ordered actions or habits does not mean

that the person is unaware of their actions; rather, it suggests that the actions and the situation are quite familiar. Similarly, Dewey emphasized the characteristic of habits not as “mindless” but instead as expected and predictable, meaning that the person’s resulting behavior is less surprising. Artists clearly experience their actions as reliable during habitual engagement. Habitual engagement represents the least amount of active interpretation by the artists when making their artwork. When artists use habitual engagement, they are less likely to modify or change their actions through reflective thought. Habitual engagement is the consistent use of actions and applied meanings (conventions) upon which the artists rely when approaching their work.

Another example of the success of internalizing artistic conventions is through the use of body movements. Artists disclosed that their hand movements, motions, and gestures felt natural at times. Through increased practice and repetition of gestures, artists master their hand movements (for example, when drawing certain lines and shapes) and their learning becomes embodied. Embodied means that artists learned customary practices and habits through experience with their physical body, from which they then could reflect on those acquired behaviors (Pagis 2009; Waskul and Van der Rier 2002). Artists often rely on the consistency of their movements, particularly during painting. This finding of embodied knowledge is consistent with other empirical work relating to the body, notably Loïc Wacquant’s (1995) study of boxers, Erin O’Connor (2005) ethnographic study of glass-blowing, and Michael Pagis’s (2009) study of practitioners of meditation. However, artists first have to learn from experience and practice how to make those body motions, from which they then integrate their body knowledge into their *shaping practices*, thus engaging in embodied self-reflexivity. Artists interviewed

experienced embodied self-reflexivity as self-monitoring when applying their skills such as training their gestures and movements as in the example of Bradley's blind drawing exercises. Thus, for artists, their hands are a source of learning and knowledge, from which they can then engage in body intentionality.

The importance of embodied knowledge for artists is a finding consistent with other empirical research on learning mathematics (Roth 2001; Goldin Meadow 1993, 1997, 1999). For example, Bradley, one of the painters interviewed, described practicing lines without seeing them in order to train his hand to match a desired convention and to achieve a higher skill level. Artists like Jason, Marie, Paul, Shannon, and Vicky recalled that after many years of practice, their movements felt like second nature. Indeed, most of the artists interviewed reported that they reached a point where they no longer had to explicitly think about what to do with their hands – they just did it. Additionally, the finding of embodied movements as occurring with less reflective thought is consistent with Banfield and Burgess (2013) study of visual artists. Consequently, it became clear that artists interviewed have gained experiential knowledge through their hand movements, and that they use this experiential knowledge to interact with social conventions, internalizing those social meanings by developing gestural habits. Once artists form routinized habits of the body, their gestures represent reliable use of socially shaped movements. Sibyl Kleiner (2009) found that over time, ballet dancers also move their bodies based on consistent routines, which she relates to evidence of the shaping influence of social structure for dancers.

Moreover, through social reception and through their own interpretive processes, artists receive feedback that what they created from their gestures was successful. In this

sense, other people's social interactions with artists' finished art products remain a source of continuous learning of shared conventions. Artists' understanding of conventions with the body means that the artists' movements are "socially shaped" (Shilling 1993; Featherstone and Turner 1995). The social feedback that artists receive starts with early interaction with family and friends. Later, artists become more sophisticated in their gestures through social-experiential learning, through coordinated networks, and through practice and repetition. For artists, practiced gestures influence how artists use both reflective thinking and acting when making their artwork. Thus, movements of the body are a means by which artists can interact with, internalize, and act out social meanings through tacit experience. Although the internalization of social meanings often occurs through language (Charmaz 1980), as exemplified in an artist's process of embodied knowledge, artists also communicate socially shaped behaviors through their body movements. Thus, the findings of embodied self-reflexivity in this study expand on the symbolic interactionist notion of shared communication through not only words but also through gestures. The significance of the body relates back to the central tenet of pragmatism, which is that action and experience are the basis for the acquisition of socially shared knowledge (Dewey and Bentley 1949; Peirce [1887] 1955; Shalin 1986).

Another type of social communication that artists demonstrate when making their artwork is the use of their artwork to advance their goals and ideas. Ultimately, artists make visual pieces for other people to see and interact with, and for the artists themselves to have a sense of accomplishment from their audiences' interactions with their work. The final art product is the vehicle for an artist's engagement in social interaction and communication with unique visual images. Although several artists described not

engaging in the looking-glass self, those artists still maintained a specific goal they wished to accomplish with their final art product. For instance, some artists wanted to communicate a high level of mastery over artistic conventions and customary practices, and felt pride and accomplishment at communicating their skills. Other artists emphasized more of a story or message with their art pieces. Several artists described that their intentions were for their audience to have an emotional reaction to their artwork. Regardless of the goal, these artists maintained that advancing their goals and ideas came from years of mastery of artistic conventions and a subsequent maturation of visual communication. Thus, they demonstrated that they internalized the expectations and shared meanings of their art worlds when they advanced their goals because they became more thoughtful about reaching more people with their work in order to have a successful result for themselves. Even though these artists may not have had a specific audience in mind (although some did), they spoke to their collective art communities by demonstrating their command of conventions, tools, materials, and ideas. Therefore, as evidenced by the interview responses, when these artists set goals, they show a way in which they have internalized socially shared meanings and have acted upon those meanings with their final art pieces.

Another way that artists clearly show that they have internalized and acted on social expectation when creating their artwork is by imagining the reception of their art pieces by others. The term “looking-glass self” refers to when a person imagines other people’s reactions to their own behavior, then imagines their own reaction, followed by a reflection on all of those possible reactions (Cooley 1902). Several of the artists interviewed described experiencing the dynamic of the looking-glass self, particularly

when they were creating art for either a specific or a very public audience. For artists, the looking-glass self phenomenon is an example of how artists have interpreted and internalized social context. Ultimately, social interactions shape artists actions because of the artists' desire for certain imagined goals for themselves. This finding illustrates Howard Becker's (1982) point that artists make decisions and actions "as they imagine others might respond" (p. 200). Artists communicate with their audiences by using a shared understanding, and, in the case of all the interviewees, through visual pieces. One way that artists achieve shared meaning is by taking into consideration how other people will receive their visual art pieces.

Artists' processes when making artwork exemplify the many ways in which "people act toward things based on the meaning they give them" (Blumer 1969:3). This process of symbolization is acquired by artists through webs of relationships within their art worlds and by their use of reflexive thought, habitual behaviors, embodied knowledge, and communication of their intentions. Artists demonstrate that they have internalized and interpreted socially shared meaning by acting out and mastering artistic conventions in their artistic processes. Often the process of internalizing and interpreting shared meaning occurred through shared language: interaction, learning, feedback from other people, the looking-glass self, and internal reflexive thinking. However, artists also showed that they learned and acted upon conventions through gestures and hand movements. Thus, artists provided another context for shared communication by internalizing socially-shaped movements of the body with embodied knowledge. Lastly, the routinized meaning for artists represents social structures in the form of art worlds, which contextualizes their fields of experience.

### *Engaging Novelty*

Artists' processes for making artwork demonstrate that they regularly and purposely engage in making original meaning through their novel actions. As is outlined in the findings of this study, artists consistently deviate from social conventions in order to create new elements of their artwork. Although these aspects are relatively small compared to the artists' overarching use of conventions, the ways in which artists create novelty is significant. Artists find ways to create emerging meaning and new action on a regular basis. This intentional use of novelty provides insight into the multiple ways that people engage in creativity. Overall, artists' art-making processes also illustrate Blumer's (1969) third premise of symbolic interactionism, that meaning is modified through an interpretive process, and Charmaz (1980) and Snow's (2001) assertion that meaning-making becomes more explicit when people's meanings, actions, and situations change or become problematic. In general, this principle of emergence captures the ways in which people construct new socially shared meanings (Mead 1938). As Snow (2001) explains, "The principle of emergence encompasses processes out of which new, novel, or revitalized social entities, or cognitive and emotional states, arise that constitute departures from, challenges to, and clarifications or transformations of everyday routines, practices, or perspectives" (p.372). The findings of this study demonstrate the emergent conditions of creative and novel actions, and several processes in which artists are able to make original aspects of their work.

The artists interviewed described originality as occurring mostly when they were engaged in the play and judgment stages, and *immersion*. Some artists discussed that their actions during these stages were more "in the moment," and thus less predictable;

consequently, the results of those actions were often unexpected. Other artists reported that during their more spontaneous actions they tapped into discovery, investigation, and a process of trial and error, suggesting that they encountered something new while working. As a result, these artists considered the results of their in-the-moment actions as special and exciting. Several artists also said that making in-the-moment decisions was the goal when composing artwork. In terms of emergence, in-the-moment actions reflect temporality (Mead 1932, 1936; Puddephatt 2005). Temporality is the present moment from which a person acts using past experiences while simultaneously being oriented towards the future. For the artists in this study, the many ways they engaged in generating novelty in their work were all unified within the context of temporality. Furthermore, mastery of skills and artistic conventions is meaningful because in order to tap into in-the-moment emergent creations, artists report treating the familiar situation of their project as an unfamiliar situation, as if they are not sure what to do or how to approach it. Artists can successfully treat their projects as unfamiliar by interacting playfully with their approach to composing or by encountering situations when composing in which they truly do not know how to proceed (which, in turn, leads them to engage in problem solving). Pragmatist Hans Joas (1996) refers to this type of emergence as situated creativity: people create novelty through a revision of their possible strategies and actions when confronting the demands of a new situation. Temporality and situated creativity, then, are the conditions that underlie an artist's novel actions, specifically during the play and judgments, *immersion*, and when the artist is working with new materials.

The most common way that the artists in the sample engaged in emergence was through the play stage. During play, artists described not knowing where they were going

with their actions (for example, when adding certain textures in an area of a painting). Artists used an unplanned, childlike, and unpredictable approach to creating their art, and subsequently they reported that during play they felt more likely to break conventions or, as some said, break “habits,” in order to create something original. Like children playing, these artists approached their canvases or projects without anticipating their own actions such as by treating the situation of their project as unfamiliar and then reconstructing their actions according to that moment.

Artists during play are essentially engaged in improvisation, which affords artists the opportunity for openness and spontaneity. This is a similar phenomenon to Frederick Seddon’s (2005) findings that when jazz artists improvise in the moment, they rely on both habitual skills and unplanned actions. For artists, play is an emergent process during which they try not to predict or control their actions in order to create something original in their work. Stephen Nachmanovitch (1990) states that improvisation is the “balance between structure and spontaneity” and that this is the “source” of creativity (p. 5). Playful engagement demonstrates a type of novelty where artists apply their skills without controlling the result, thus leaving space for surprises. Notably, artists describe play as a particularly enjoyable and pleasurable part of their process.

Next, artists described using judgment moments as a means of engaging in novelty. Some interviewees emphasized that they used judgments more than play for creating novelty in their work. These artists often referred to judgments as problem-solving or trial-and-error. They described judgments as in-the-moment decisions that evaluate previous or current choices. James gave an example of changing a background for his painting from light to dark: he did not plan out which way to make the

background, but at one point while working, he made the spontaneous choice to change it from light to dark. In pragmatist terms, when artists engage in judgments, their habitual practice (making a light background) has failed in some fashion, and they revise their actions to explore something new (making the background darker). The revised action reflects pragmatist Charles Peirce's (1960) concept of judgments: the person names the failed situation and the resulting new action and establishes an entirely new meaning. In the context of James' background choice, he formed new meaning when he decided to change the color, and this decision may have caused him to consider starting with a dark background on a future painting. And, as James solved the situation of his background through judgments, the novelty of his actions may possibly lessen, especially if he repeats the new action enough that it eventually becomes conventional in his work. Furthermore, novelty created during the judgment stage demonstrates a path back to social-experiential shaping influences.

Additionally, the interviewees emphasized that their judgments were based on previous knowledge and experiences. They made decisions by interpreting their *shaping practices* in the moment. During judgments, the artist's role as an interpretive actor is more apparent than during play; this is similar to the symbolic interactionist point that self-conscious reflection increases when people confront unknown circumstances (Charmaz 1981; Puddephatt 2005; Snow 2001). Artists think through and reflect upon their unknown situations when taking new actions. The finding of reflexivity supports Dewey's and Peirce's points that people are not just subject to external social forces or internalized social expectations; instead, people read their unknown situations and construct their own dispositions from previous learning and experience. In other words,

artists engage in problem-solving when applying judgments. As they did in play, artists described the results of their actions during judgments as novel and creative. The experience of judgments is similar to Getzel's and Csikszentmihaly's (1976) findings that fine art students showed more originality in their artwork when approaching their artistic processes as problem-solving processes. Since judgments occur in the context of temporality as in-the-moment decisions, this type of thinking is not step-by-step but instead is made up of momentary impressions that artists make. Finally, artists attributed their thoughts during judgments as implicitly linked to their previous knowledge and experiences.

Moreover, in their interviews, these artists reported making novel aspects of their work when they were immersed in flow moments. Artists described their actions during immersion as the best version of what they could do. Interestingly, artists felt that the best version of their actions occurred during immersion, including both the application of convention and novelty. This finding is consistent with other studies of flow, which assert that people feel they perform in an optimal state when immersed in their present activity (Nideffer 2002). Also, these particular findings support Banfield's and Burgess' (2013) study of artists and flow in which artists reported intense enjoyment occurring as a balance between challenge and skill, and *immersion* not sustainable over a long period of time. The artists interviewed for my study recalled experiencing great enjoyment during deep immersion states because of the experience of quieting the mind, the success of applying their skills, and the surprising results of their immediate actions. Flow is a unique way for artists to engage with novelty because of the particular skills artists acquire in order to reach an immersed state. For example, an artist must have adequate

command and mastery over the materials, techniques, embodied knowledge, and ideas behind the piece, while still feeling challenged enough to create something new. Overall, immersion is significant for an artist's process because of optimal use of actions, both conventionally and by allowing the unexpected to occur, thereby creating novelty.

Furthermore, artists intentionally tried to reach flow states, just as they did with play. However, artists described that deep immersion was difficult to achieve because it requires a quieting of the mind, a certain level of familiarity and mastery by the artist, and a balance between challenge and tedium. When achieving flow, similarly to habitual engagement, artists did not require explicit reflective thought in order to control their actions. However, unlike habitual engagement, artists felt that during immersion they were able to make unexpected and creative contributions to their work. In contrast to the reflexivity of judgment moments, flow is characterized by the artist's description of quieting his or her mind as a way to proceed with action. Artists indicated that when they did not think so explicitly about their actions, they were able to allow for spontaneity and surprises. The process for generating new meaning from spontaneity is consistent with Mead's theory of emergence (1934). When artists were hyper-focused on the moment, they most often experienced a quieting of the mind, and, by extension, flow. Similarly, with play and judgments, the occurrence of temporality is important for generating novel meaning.

Based on gathered interview data, visual artists engage in emergence in several ways, all within the context of temporality: by play as a way to break convention, by judgments as a way to problem-solve, and by immersion as a way to act spontaneously. These approaches to composing that visual artists use to create novelty in their finished

art products are consistent with Edmond and Candy's (2002) process of exploration by graphic designers – breaking from conventions, total immersion in the activity, problem-solving, and parallel channels. However, Edmond and Candy's dimension of parallel channels, in which artists applied multiple dispositions from other artists' work or influences to create novelty, did not emerge as consistent with the findings of this study. Artists of the study mentioned very little about using parallel lines as various ideas and concepts of others. Instead, the visual artists of this study emphasized the ways they played and manipulated multiple materials and media as ways to make original and creative artwork.

For example, Tom, a painter, multimedia artist, and graphic designer, discussed mixing various materials such as different glues, cotton fabric pieces, and raw fibers with inks, oil-based paints, and acrylics, to which he then applied fire. He described this as “tampering” with media and that “in this way” he is “able to create a very unique and original print.” Also, Christopher, Roxie, and Valor explained that their goals for creativity are to take concepts from cultural texts – everyday life inspirations – and make these concepts slightly different and “curious” with their techniques. Furthermore, Cecilia, Eddie, and Tom discussed using materials like resin and techniques like encaustic in unexpected ways to add originality to their pieces, thus breaking with the conventions of these particular materials.

This dimension may not have been analyzed in the same way as the study with graphic designers because the professional visual artists in the sample often described multiple conceptual influences as following convention, not novelty. A difference between traditional artists who use physical materials and digital artists could be the way

in which they view the use of parallel dimensions. The visual artists in the sample demonstrated awareness of multiple artistic influences and they expressed their originality as inclusive of something unexpected. Although artists reported that they understand their creativity as bringing something new to their art, they also emphasized that these novel aspects were modest when compared to their application of conventions. Thus, artists' interviewed described their creativity as a novel contribution, but not necessarily as particularly innovative. Notably, for these professional artists, demonstrating mastery over convention was a meaningful part of their goals for their finished art pieces.

The artists interviewed expressed that they engage in meaning-generation and learning through the modification and manipulation of their material environments. Artists engage in interpretation and gain experiential knowledge when working with new materials during *development and mastery*, and although they become well-versed in their materials, they still can experience unexpected results. For example, painter Cecilia and multimedia artist Shannon both recalled that when they work with new materials, they are more active in their explicit internal reflection. When artists begin working with new materials, they must learn to take on the role of the materials or tools in order to become familiar with using them: in other words, these artists think through the way those materials or tools will interact with their art piece. Some artists described working with materials as co-creating. This type of novelty – interpreting the material environment – reflects the principle of emergence as theorized by George Herbert Mead (1934). Another way emergence occurs for an artist is through unexpected results, which can occur even after the artist has become familiar with using the materials. Printmaker

Garrett and painter-sculptor Jason both emphasized that the materials (such as inks) sometimes fall on a pad or a canvas in ways that they do not anticipate. In fact, these artists allow this lack of control over their materials so that they can achieve unexpected results, and this spontaneity is vital to the artist's evaluation of the success of the art piece. In these ways, artists demonstrate how they generate systems of meaning around their interplay with physical and material objects. The importance of the meaning-making that occurs between people and their material environments is a principle of pragmatist thought (Puddephatt 2005).

Visual artists demonstrated that they purposely and deliberately engage with meaning generation in their artistic processes. Artists' processes exemplify that novelty can be achieved in several ways. However, in-the-moment actions and treating the canvas or project as new or problematic (in which known techniques or approaches would be unsuccessful) were the underlying characteristics of the different dimensions of novelty. The concepts of temporality (Mead 1932, 1938) and situated creativity (Joas 1996) for visual artists' processes support both the pragmatists' and the symbolic interactionists' understandings of emergence. Lastly, emergence is defined as newly generated shared *social* meaning. The novel features that artists develop become part of social convention when artists reuse those features, talk about them with others, and display their finished art pieces. Artists interact with their creation of new meaning through their own interpretations; they apply their mastery of conventions to evaluate their own work. Thus, novelty created by visual artists becomes part of those artists' *shaping practices*, and this returns us to the earlier symbolic interactionist principle that meaning arises out of a social context (Blumer 1969:3).

### *Conclusion*

The findings of this study are an organization of the artistic creative processes for the professional visual artists who participated and were interviewed. The conceptual model outlined here takes into account the major patterns that artists described about their art-making, as well as their spectra of approaches. The five major themes – *shaping practices, development and mastery, doing art, immersion, and fulfillments* – represent the processes that the interviewees underwent when making their artwork. The conceptual framework illustrates that artists' processes are not linear but instead continual and reciprocal. The findings of this study also illuminate the multiple ways in which a social context shapes an artist's creative process.

First, the finding showed that artists in the sample overwhelmingly had close family members who were artists themselves. The multi-generational occurrence of artists is reflective of a sociological concept called social reproduction. However, since this dissertation primarily uses a symbolic interactionist framework when analyzing the data the finding of social reproduction is not amply addressed and explored. Future research will examine how becoming an artist is shaped by familial influences. The data of the project will be used to analyze the context of choosing an artistic career for artists who have family members from previous generations who are also careers artists.

The theoretical model of artists' creative process draws into focus Howard Becker's art world since artists described their process through the context of multiple types of social influences. Artists learn conventions, customary practices, and the values and rewards of art-making from direct interactions with a web of people within their art worlds. Also, artists internalize social expectations, and anticipate social reception of their

artwork. Although, artists make their art in isolation, they engage in a symbolic conversation with imagined generalized others when creating and composing. The findings of this study illuminate the multiple ways artists experience social influences when establishing a learning framework, when directly composing, and during the presentation and reception of their artwork.

However, in focusing on the social-psychological process of creating artwork this study did not fully represent visual artists art worlds since art worlds exist as a nexus between many different people such as curators, patrons, and audiences. In order explore an art world in more depth additional data collection with people other than artists is suggested. By examining other people involved in art words a study could better determine the way that collective changes to artists' conventions come about and the influence of originality and novelty in this wider context. In considering art world from more viewpoints a study could better illuminate the social nature of how social conventions are reinvented or made anew.

Although artists make their own immediate and autonomous decisions when creating a piece of art, they rely on a socio-experiential foundation that is derived from shared meaning with other people and from social contexts. Visual artists serve as an example of the extent to which social interactions and social contexts shape people, even when they are doing something alone. Art-making and creativity are traditionally viewed as individualistic and self-contained activities or expressions (Maslow 1974); however, the descriptions provided by these interviewees emphasize the importance of these artists' shared experiences with others. In particular, these artists' uses of artistic

conventions demonstrate the extent of their engagement in shared social meaning when creating artwork.

Not only do artists rely on their socially shared knowledge when making artwork by themselves, but they also reinvent shared meaning by engaging in novel actions. Although artists mostly rely on shared conventions as established by their *shaping practices*, they also maintain that the unexpected and surprising changes they make to their artwork are fundamental and what makes their process exciting. Artists discussed these novel aspects as occurring less often than did their use of conventions; thus, they felt that their modification of meaning is not necessarily a reinvention of conventions, but instead is the reproduction of artistic conventions with minor changes to make the work their own. Artists learned to engage in novel actions through experience and practice, mastery of conventions and skills, and social feedback. The interviewees demonstrated the multiple ways that emergence can occur, such as in childlike play, in-the-moment judgments, immersion, and manipulation of new materials. In these ways, artists approach their canvas or art piece as unfamiliar (not explicitly relying on convention and previous knowledge) in order to create something new. In general, originality occurs because of an artist's ability to allow for spontaneous actions, problem-solving, and deviation from convention. Through adding novelty to their work, these artists create new socially shared meanings as soon as an audience interacts with their artwork. Thus, meaning generation becomes significant when it is shared with others, and later, it possibly can become incorporated into social convention. The unique contributions artists make to their own work – even work they make in isolation – still comes from a social foundation and is a co-creation with social conventions.

The findings of this study support both the classic and the contemporary principles of symbolic interactionism. The fundamental concepts outlined by Herbert Blumer are exemplified by the social foundations of knowledge for artists, their visual communication with others by using shared conventions, and their ability to engage in new meaning generations. The multi-dimensional process of art-making described by the artists of this study establishes how these artists learn and use habitual behavior through explicit reflective thoughts, less reflective actions, and how they use their ability to treat their projects as new situations with in-the-moment actions and thoughts, sometimes resulting in novelty.

Additionally, artists' processes demonstrate the importance of actions, experiences, the physical body, and interactions with materials, all as components of shared communication. The pragmatist emphasis of the centrality of action is supported in the findings this study. Although pragmatist principles are the root of symbolic interactionism, contemporary studies in this area are less likely to analyze the significance of shared meaning and the creation of shared meaning through the mediation of people's material and physical interactions. Since visual artists essentially interact and communicate with others through shared meaning of visual (physical) objects, this group of artists serves as an example of the ways in which artists generate meaning through a material context.

Moreover, artists' creative processes are rooted in a multifaceted social context. By examining this finding through a symbolic interactionist theoretical framework, the coordinated behavior among artists reveals a seemingly stable social structure as a reliable system of meaning within an artist's art world. The ever-changing aspects of

social processes are reflected in an artist's continuous modification of conventions once he or she shares his or her artwork with others. Thus, a professional visual artist's creative process and original work exemplify the symbolic interactionist explanations of social life and social behavior.

Based on the findings of this study, future work that examines people's social processes in general should consider examining the social, experiential, embodied, and material contexts involved. The artists interviewed for this study demonstrated that the complexity of what they do is not limited to social-psychological considerations but also to situational contexts. Moreover, artists interviewed showed how they interacted with social learning through the use of their physical body, thus resulting in an embodied self-reflexivity for artists when internalizing social conventions. These findings particularly inform work being done using a symbolic interactionist framework by emphasizing that people's fields of interactions and experiences reflect both coordinated social behavior and ongoing changes of social life. Future work in this area can build upon the findings of this study by further investigating how artists learn the process of the creative act, and how new meaning, once made and shared with others, becomes part of collective conventions.

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APPENDIX A

Consent for Participation in Interview Research

University of Miami, Department of Sociology

The following information describes the research study in which you are being asked to participate. Please read the information carefully. At the end, you will be asked to verbally agree if you agree to participate. You are being asked to participate in a project that explores how visual artist think and feel while engaged in their particular work.

Your participation is for an interview, approximately one hour long. The types of questions asked are about training, practice, and engagement with making art. The questions ask about feeling, thought processes, and mechanics of making art. This interview will be audio recorded, then later transcribed. Approximately 40 persons will be interviewed for this project.

We do not anticipate you will experience any personal risk or discomfort from taking part in this study. No direct benefit may be promised to you for your participation in the study. You may skip any question you do not wish to answer.

Records and information will be secured in locked box and on password protected computers. These are only accessible to the researchers. Confidentiality will be maintained in written analysis by not providing identifying details and by using pseudonyms. The recorded audio files will be deleted after five years.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to refuse to participate in the study or withdraw your consent at any time during the study. Christina Sanchez Volatier [csanchezvolatier@miami.edu](mailto:csanchezvolatier@miami.edu) and Linda Belgrave [l.belgrave@miami.edu](mailto:l.belgrave@miami.edu) will gladly answer any questions you may have concerning the purpose, procedures, and outcome of this project.

I have read the information in this consent form and agree to participate in this study and be audio taped during the interview. I have had the chance to ask any questions I have about this study, and they have been answered for me. I am entitled to a copy of this form. Completion of this interview is considered your consent to participate.

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Signature of Participant

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Date

---

Printed name of Participant

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Signature of Investigator

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Guide

1. Tell me about how you came to be an artist?
2. Did you go to school for art? If so, please tell me about your experience.
3. What types of art to you do and have done?
4. Tell me about a recent art project, and please describe the process from the beginning to end. What steps are involved?
5. Can you describe how you feel, or what you are thinking when you make art?
6. When, if all, did you first notice these experiences?
7. What is it like? How does it happen? Is there anything that influences these experiences?  
If so, in what way?
8. What are your thoughts and feelings about this?
9. How, if at all, have your thoughts and feelings changed about the experience of making art?
10. Tell me more about how you go about making art? What do you do?
11. Could you describe a typical way you prepare to engage in art, and do so? How do think and feel when you do not engage in preparing for or making art? Are there any similarities or differences? Please describe?
12. What do you think is the most important part of these types of experience?
13. What do think is the least important?
14. How often does this occur in the same way, if ever?
15. In terms of your training, or practicing, what steps are involved in this type of experiences?

16. What do you do that you consider unique or special when creating art?
17. If you could ask other artist to describe their thinking process, what would you ask?
18. Is there anything that you might not have thought about before that occurred to you during this interview?
19. Is there anything else I should know to understand your thinking process better?
20. Is there anything you would like to ask me

APPENDIX C

Chart 1. Participant Descriptions

Participant Pseudonyms	Descriptions of Visual Artists
Edith	Edith is a sculptor (in her 60s) and a professor of visual arts at a program with graduate studies. She is a white woman who has been an artist for over 30 years.
Bradley	Bradley is an abstract painter (in his 40s) and a professor of visual artist. He is a German migrant who has lived in South Florida for more than 10 years. He has been a professional artist for more than 20 years.
James	James is abstract painter (in his 60s) and a professor of visual arts at a program with graduate studies. He is a second generation Cuban and has been a professional artist for over 30 years.
Roxie	Roxie is an abstract painter (in her mid-20s) and a graduate student of visual arts. She is a white woman and has been a professional artist for more than 5 years.
Garret	Garret is a painter and print artist, with experience doing graffiti art (in his mid-20s). Garret is a graduate student in a visual art program. He is second generation Cuban and has been a professional artist for more than 5 years.
Selma	Selma is a mixed-mediums painter (in her 40s) She is a migrant from Argentina and has been living in the South Florida area for more than 15 years. She has been a professional artist for more than 20 years.
Tom	Tom is primarily a painter and graphic design artist (in his 50s). He also engages in multi-media artwork and photography. Tom is a migrant from France and has lived in South Florida for more than 10 years. He has been a professional artist for more than 30 years.
Marie	Marie is primarily a painter, and sculptor (in her 40s). She also does multi-media artwork, and digital artwork. Marie is a migrant from Argentina and has lived in South Florida for more than 10 years. She has been a professional artist for more than 20 years.
Christopher	Christopher is a graffiti artist (in his 30s). He is a migrant from Chile living in South Florida for more than 15 years. He has been a professional artist for more than 10 years.
Jason	Jason is a painter, mixed-media artist, sculptor, and graffiti artist (in his 40s). He is a migrant from Venezuela and has lived in the United States for more than 20 years. He has

	lived in the South Florida area intermittently. He has been a professional artist for more than 20 years.
Vicky	Vicky is an abstract painter (in her 40s). She is a white woman and she is native to South Florida. She has been a professional artist for more than 10 years.
Howie	Howie is a painter and performance artist (in his 50s). He is a white man that has been living in South Florida for more than 10 years. He has been a professional artist for more than 15 years.
Ethan	Ethan is a painter and multi-media a(in his 50s). He is a African-American man who has lived in South Florida for more than 15 years. He has been a professional artist for more than 15 years.
Valor	Valor is an illustrator, photographer, and graphic designer (in his 30s). He is a white man who has lived in South Florida for more than 10 years. He has been a professional artist for more than 5 years.
April	April is an illustrator (in her 20s). She is a second-generation Latina (Columbian and Mexican) and is a native of South Florida. She also engages in digital artwork. She has been a professional artist for more than 5 years.
Leo	Leo is a painter and conceptual artist (in his 30s). He is a white man who is a native of South Florida. Leo has been a professional artist for more than 15 years.
Shannon	Shannon is a painter, print-maker, and multi-media artist (in her 20s). She also engages in digital artwork. She is a white woman and is a native of South Florida. Shannon has been a professional artist for more than 5 years.
Paul	Paul is a graffiti artist and painter (in his 30s). He is a second-generation Venezuelan and a native of South Florida. He also engages in digital artwork. He has been a professional artist for more than 15 years.
Austin	Austin is a graffiti artist and graphic designer (in his 20s). He is a white man native to South Florida. He has been a professional artist for more than 5 years.
Xander	Xander is a painter and conceptual artist (in his 30s). He is a second generation Venezuelan and is a native of South Florida. He has been a professional artist for more than 10 years.