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# Emerging artists in transition: What role does information play in negotiating success and failure?

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to better understand how emerging artists use information to navigate the transition out of university, using their changing ideas of failure, success, information literacy (IL), and transition to frame the qualitative data.

A literature review is used to frame the current understanding of emerging artists and feed into the creation of the interview questions. Four emerging artists participated to elicit qualitative accounts. Descriptive and process coding was used to analyse the interviews to form the findings.

The findings present how emerging artists use information to shape their criteria for success and failure during the transitional period after leaving art school education. Three core information practices — sharing, feeding, and balancing — were observed within the interviews. With this framing insights into the emerging artists' past (learning from historic failings) and the future (envisioning future success) begin to be formed. Furthermore, this paper contributes to the knowledge of emerging artists' information practices, including the impact of their digital media usage and self-referencing as IL.

The study uses the work of other IL scholars with the information practices of emerging artists and frames them through three key ideas: IL, transition, and success and failure. This intersection of study has not been explored previously.

The results will provide direction for information professionals serving emerging artists, and for art educators preparing their students for their careers outside of university. It also deepens the understanding of the field of transition and information practices of new practitioners across fields.

## Keywords

art education; information behaviour; information literacy; transition; UK

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## 1. Introduction

Library and Information Science's (LIS) understanding of artists' information practices has progressed in recent years. There has been a deeper acknowledgement of the unique ways in which they learn, their information needs (Hemmig, 2008; Hemmig, 2009), and what information they are using (Mason & Robinson, 2011). This has led to adaptations being made to university information literacy (IL) approaches for art students (ARLIS/NA, 2018). Despite this, there is limited research on the process of moving from being an art student to becoming an established artist.

This paper uses Mason and Robinson's (2011) definition of emerging artists as "those who have recently completed formal education in art or design, are no longer in formal education or a formal career structure and are engaged in building up their own practice of the arts" (p.159). Cobbedick (1996), argues that the lack of study into artists could be due to the categorisation of them as "self-contained individuals who create via inspiration" (p.344). In that, it may be presumed that their information needs are fulfilled through mere fate (Case & Given, 2016). Art students' information behaviours have been closely examined to further university library learning (Gendron, 2009; Greer, 2015; Willcox, 2017). The transitory state of emerging artists means they are not, however, accounted for by universities or the art market. Although IL study has explored workplace learning (Forster et al., 2017) it has not yet covered art practices extensively.

This study is framed through three key ideas: IL, transition, and negotiating success and failure. Firstly, IL shapes how individuals interact with the world and research is increasingly exploring IL from the perspective of art students at university. For example, meta-literate approaches are being proposed to ensure art students' information practices are well formed for their studio practice (ARLIS/NA, 2018). This paper also considers emerging literature on the importance of *sense-making* when considering artists' information practices and behaviours, specifically, the more intangible ways they collect and use information.

Secondly, transition, the "navigation of change" and a concept that includes "individual growth and shifts in role and responsibilities" (Hicks, 2020, p. 210), will be used to frame the study. Available studies show that the information practices of emerging artists are "unusual" compared to other fields (Mason & Robinson, 2011, p. 160). In part, due to the range of their information needs, for example, the unique need for "information for inspiration" alongside technical and professional information (Mason & Robinson, 2011, p. 160). Though Mason and Robinson's (2011) work grounded emerging artists in the wider field of information practices of "new practitioners", they did not view this through the developing theories of transition. Transition, however, is important as art students are not emerging into a field with professionalised structures. Rather, they navigate multiple streams of information mostly unsupervised. With this, the paper uses transition as a core basis in which to look at emerging artists' information practices to understand how these are recontextualised as their roles as artists shift from the formalised structures of university to self-determined structures.

Finally, negotiating success and failure is essential as it can be utilised to learn how artists in transition navigate turbulence and define what fruitful practices are outside educational systems. Information practices are, also, contextual (Hicks, 2020; Lloyd, 2005) and drawing upon literature from within the field of art making will be important when framing this study with an understanding from artists themselves.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Information and emerging artists

Toyne's (1977) investigation into artist information practices notes art students' preferences for browsing over targeted research, a desire for technical guidance, and a need for a diverse range of themes when looking for inspiration. In comparing this to newer studies, similar themes hold true. Much of this work is compiled in Hemmig's (2009) literature, which studies published material on artists information practices, and presents five needs for information: inspiration, specific visual elements, knowledge of materials and techniques, marketing and career guidance, and knowledge of currents trends in the art world (Case & Given, 2016; Hemming,

2008). Case and Given (2016) note that, whilst Hemmig gives specific examples of where this information could be found, the “information needs of artists are as broad as human experience itself” and these needs are harder to place in usual library categories (Case & Given, 2016, p. 316).

Mason and Robinson (2011) further the work done by Hemmig (2009) and specify the information behaviour of emerging artists. They find that whilst emerging artists are also enthusiastic about traditional printed material, the internet is fundamental to their information access and often the first source called upon. The study also shows that they heavily preferred accessing information for free, leading to “innovative, if not totally ethical, heuristics” (Mason & Robinson, 2011, p. 178).

Art students have been noted to shy away from exploratory artistic practices due to “lack of knowledge of what the [institutional] norms are” (Hannigan, 2018, p. 175), meanwhile, emerging artists confront the realities of establishing a presence as a working artist. This shift includes an increased need for career and marketing information and adapting to a reality where they do not have access to university sources and not having the finances to access them independently (Mason & Robinson, 2011). Mason and Robinson (2011) propose that these two shifts present the most prominent traits regarding emerging artists information behaviour: “finding information cheaply, or for free, and having a forum for discussion, debate and advice seeking” (Mason & Robinson, 2011, p. 178). Finding information cheaply and having peer-support present unique characteristics in emerging artist information practices that express not only the precarity in income but also a need for community when traversing out of education.

## 2.2 Sense-making

Gendron (2009) suggests that while artists often view their information practices as chaotic this is essentially an expression of a multidisciplinary approach. She posits that sense-making, “the myriad of ways in which people actively or passively gather information”, has not been fully recognised in the field of artists and information (Gendron, 2009, p. 27). Further, Cowan (2004) claims that information seeking often reduces the process to a deficit. The artists need something that they are missing, rather than “a creative process motivated by curiosity, pleasure, or sensory feedback” (Cowan, 2004, p. 18). This presents a new point of view that suggests previous literature may have simplified artist information processes. Chappell (2017) posits that this is a shift, viewed across disciplines in information studies, to no longer viewing literacies in isolation (media, visual, digital). This recognition can be seen in the Art Libraries Society (ARLIS) *Information Competencies* published in 2018 that presents them with a focus on meta-literacies.

Cowan’s (2004) paper presents the importance of a meta-literate approach, emphasising that information-seeking in an artistic practice is rhizomatic in nature and that information-seeking does not need to be driven by an answer for a need. Hunt and Jennings (2021) similarly use a meta-literate lens to interview two emerging artists and, as the title presents, show “the work is the work” in that the works are “vehicles for understanding” and are information in themselves (p. 51). Hunt and Jennings (2021) suggest that information professionals must attune to “a holistic picture of what it is like to investigate the world through making”, and “gathering, observing, putting together ... looking closely and feeling” are just as important as finding information (p. 51). Understanding that art making is dynamic information making and artists use self-referencing to create work is important in understanding artists’ unique information processes.

### 2.3 Transition and risk

Moving from education into work has been a prism to view transition and IL, with scholars encouraging information professionals in higher education to look beyond traditional IL skills when approaching it (Lloyd, 2017). Researchers have begun to look beyond transition as a chronological event that can be 'solved' through better preparatory IL learning (Hicks, 2020) and rather a space for discovering information needs and how information can be used to navigate and adapt to new contexts (Willson, 2019). Hicks (2020) proposes that "upheaval" is fundamental in transition (p. 212) and argues for an "examination of the role that the development of knowing plays in scaffolding processes of re-equilibration and restoration" (p. 219) during this time. Together, transition can be seen as a site of fraught systemic change for individuals. It is important for information studies to critically engage with transition as a place to navigate through rather than just prepare for.

Hicks' (2018) research into language-learners expands the field of transition and risk in IL and argues the importance of information when moving through new responsibilities. In this study, language learners, when transitioning into their new environments, developed information practices to cushion their "upheaval". This includes "observing", where the students would use their bodies and the bodies of others to "surface local practices" and "noting" to remember "valuable yet unfamiliar information" in this new space (Hicks, 2020, p. 214). The overarching theme of these practices is "mitigating risk", wherein learners connected to "local ways of knowing" to bolster against potential "academic, physical and financial risk" (Hicks, 2020, p. 214). Students were shown to be able to identify their risks and embody new information practices to challenge or prevent them.

Whilst emerging artists have not been studied in the context of transition and risk, some related ideas can be extrapolated from the information studies literature. Mason and Robinson's (2011) study into the information practices of emerging artists found that, whilst the type of information emerging artists needed and used are not dissimilar to their established counterparts, their interactions with and around the information differs. For example, whilst emerging artists acknowledge the merits of their arts education, they note feeling unprepared in their new roles and responsibilities especially surrounding self-employment, financial and tax responsibilities, marketing, and proposal writing (Mason & Robinson, 2011). To protect themselves from these risks they create "invisible college[s]" for themselves by collating their peers to share advice and debate ideas (Mason & Robinson, 2011, p. 178). These "invisible college[s]" could be seen as a "pooling" behaviour (Lloyd, 2015). "Pooling" describes "collectivising bits of information from a wider range of sources in order to gain a more comprehensive picture" and is associated with groups with a "high level of trust", and especially noted when mitigating risk and navigating transition (Lloyd, 2015, p. 1035).

Embodied practices, which are practices that are learnt and enacted through one's body, may be used to mitigate and embrace risk taking. For instance, fear and anxiety often indicate what artists value and mid-career artists often navigate their anxieties through their daily embodied practices better than emerging artists (Steinbach, 2018). Established artists use their bodies to both mitigate and use risk, and emerging artists may still be learning this embodied dexterity. Lloyd (2017) asserts that "embodied knowledge is produced through practice" and learned through a "situatedness" to "material objects, signs and symbols" relating to the practice (p. 103). Whilst there is evidence of established artists bracing themselves with embodied knowledge, there is little on how this is developed with information by emerging artists.

Further, Willcox (2017) has advocated for “creative risk-taking” to increase vulnerability for student and teacher as they argue not enough is done for arts students to feel safe to do so (p. 11). Vulnerability and risk taking is encouraged in Willcox’s classroom through visual journals that are used to make critical judgements as well as a focus on the art making process rather than just on final pieces (Willcox, 2017). It can be inferred that artists do not necessarily get better at matching their vision to their finished artwork, rather, they build resilience against this repeated disappointment. Risk-taking is integral to art making and it can be a core factor in the successfulness of a practice as artists move from being students to experienced artists. What is missing is how this transition happens in practice and how the information that emerging artists engage with enables and disables risk-taking in transition.

## **2.4 Success and failure**

This paper looks at literature from working artists, their educators, and their academic communities to see how emerging artists discover what constitutes success for them and grow on what they consider a failure. Le Feuvre (2010) argues that failure is “endemic” in art making and the question should not be what a failure is but rather how failure is harnessed. Whilst “perfection and idealism are satisfying”, failure needs engagement and transitions artists into the unknown (Le Feuvre, 2010, p. 17).

Whilst there is a lack of literature on emerging artists and failure specifically, the literature consulted looks at art students and artists more generally to build a fuller picture. What is known is that emerging artists’ information environments are vital in giving them a sense of identity to feel comfortable to make work (Mason & Robinson, 2011; Willcox, 2017). Framing this study through how artists have perceived both success and failure in their artistic practice and how their information practices have helped or hindered working between these states, gives context to the study. What emerging artists perceive as a success and what they perceive as failure shapes how they interact with information; who they are looking for information from, and how they interact with the information they make themselves. It is especially pertinent in the malleable years after education when emerging artists have a freedom to explore outside of university structures.

In the anthology *Failure*, Le Feuvre (2010) develops four chapters that follow the process of working through failure within art: Dissatisfaction and Rejection, Idealism and Doubt, Error and Incompetence, and Experiment and Progress. Whilst not a traditional information study, this thematic collation of artist experiences gives insight to how artists process information to create their work. Emerging artists, alongside transitioning out of the potential protectiveness of university, are also discovering what finished work looks like to them without the external pressures of assessments and grading; bringing freedom and, possibly, uncertainty.

Le Feuvre (2010) postulates that “failure in art making activity is the gap between intention and realisation” (p. 13) and, by understanding the “unrealizability” (p.12) in the search for perfection, artists discover an appreciation for open-ended experimentation. There is discussion that in not fully appreciating the dynamism of failing in arts education, institutions risk flattening the artistic process, especially when these processes cannot be quantitatively measured according to education standards (Hannigan, 2018). This also makes understanding emerging artist information practices more difficult as the ways in which art educators define failure may not align with how artists experience it.

### 3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews with four emerging artists. This approach was selected to create themes across the conversations and not to explicitly inform the language of the interviewees (Lune & Berg, 2017) as well as allow them to express more personal responses outside of a quantitative matrix.

Hemmig (2008, 2009) and Mason and Robinson's (2011) quantitative research were vital in shaping the interview questions. Hemmig's (2009) five needs were used to distinguish between artistic processes and administrative processes in emerging artists' daily practices and allowed for questions to be formed on how these interact with each other. Mason and Robinson's (2011) acknowledgement of the financially insecure environments these artists exist within opened discussions on how this shapes their information behaviours and environments. Nevertheless, the interviews adopted a more open-ended approach, and similarly to Gorichanaz (2020), did not prescribe what information was to the interviewees, as to not limit the study to the "researcher's experience or imagination" (Cowan, 2004, p. 15) (See Appendix for interview questions).

Four interviews were conducted in this study. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling from a personal network of emerging artists working in London. Each participant had left art school education — three having completed Fine Art bachelor's degrees and one having completed a Fine Art master's degree — within the last five years. All are practicing artists in London, although the majority work part-time, full-time, or freelance jobs outside their practices to complement their incomes. At the time of the interviews, all participants were between 26–28 years old. In recruiting for the study, a range of artistic practices were sought out and the study includes:

- One painter/filmmaker (Participant 1/P1),
- One painter (Participant 2/P2), and;
- Two working mostly in sculpture and mixed media (Participant 3/P3 & Participant 4/P4).

This is not to produce comparative results but to provide a broader range of experiences. Three of the four interviews were conducted in-person; two in their studios and one inside their home. The final interview was done using video conferencing software. The interviews were between 45 minutes to an hour long. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed using transcription software, and then corrected manually by hand.

After transcription, descriptive and process coding was undertaken. Descriptive coding was used to find themes that have been noted in previous literature, such as, "transition", "risk", "decision making", and "information environments" (Hicks, 2020; Hemmig, 2009; Mason & Robinson, 2011; Cobbledick, 1996). Secondly, process coding was conducted to find actions within their information experiences. Together, it formed the basis of the findings into several core processes of emerging artists.

There are limitations to this study, firstly, due to its limited number of participants, there is not a diverse range of ages, genders, and races. All the artists interviewed live and work in London furthering the overrepresentation of information literature from the UK when there is a real need to hear from different cultural contexts (Chappell, 2017). Furthermore, whilst disability was independently brought up by a participant, the study is not framed to explore this in detail. These limitations should be used to influence future study.

## 4. Findings: Information practices

The findings present how emerging artists use information to shape their version of success and failure during the transitional period after leaving art school education.

Three core information practices — *sharing*, *feeding*, and *balancing* — were observed within the interviews. Firstly, *sharing* constitutes feedback within emerging artist networks as well as advice seeking in career navigation, and is composed of the codes *critiquing* and *pooling*. Secondly, *feeding* wherein artists are actively and passively accumulating information to inform their artistic creation. This is specified by the codes *bingeing* and *looking*. Finally, *balancing*, where emerging artists organise and develop methods to negotiate the multiple roles and responsibilities associated with being new practitioners. This is explored through the codes *managing*, *avoiding*, and *organising*.

### 4.1. Information practice → sharing

*Sharing* includes having an information need and using the emerging artist community to fulfil it, as well as giving feedback and sourcing support to mitigate financial or creative risk. Within university study, art students have a formalised community to share within. When working independently, however, this is not a given and the emerging artists must form these themselves. P3 stresses that in their practice “there needs to be a response” and that they are not indifferent to opinion. Whilst they are an independent practitioner, they are working within a network of artists and placing themselves within their wider profession.

*Critiquing* refers to the practice of artists applying their analysis skills learned in their education to their new environments. *Pooling* is the “collectivising bits of information... to gain a more comprehensive picture” (Lloyd, 2015, p. 1035) to mitigate risks associated with working independently.

#### 4.1.1. Sharing → critiquing

Studio critique in art school education is the activity of an artist presenting an artwork and their peers critically responding; usually mediated by tutors. It is used to collectively “evaluate student progress and assist in creative development” (Garcia & Peterson, 2017, p. 75). The critiquing activities of emerging artists outside of education do not look like traditional studio critiques; there is not necessarily an authoritative figure there to moderate the discussion and this will not contribute to a grade. They are, instead, self-determined and self-led information sharing activities that assist in creative development. Critiquing informs the artists understanding of “historical and contemporary practice” to place them “in a larger, stimulating, conversation” (Buster & Crawford, 2010, p. 90).

P1 describes the importance of viewing “bad art” with their peers, as a means of sharing and developing opinions on their own participation in contemporary art. It becomes a ground to share grievances with “reinforcement” (P1) when developing opinions of their field. What is of note is how different this encounter with “bad art” is without the sharing with a peer, with P1 describing encountering “bad art” online:

[When] you see a gallery that you respect repost a painting you fucking hate, then that's really tough ... I mean on a daily basis I probably see something like that, and I think “God, that's really upset me and like, what the hell is the point”.



Whilst the information is the same (“bad art”), the sharing critique is not present, making it feel like an isolating rather than constructive experience. P2 shares in the idea of online spaces not being ground for constructive critique, saying, “there is no space for failure”, and in turn, no space for criticism. This also highlights that different information environments greatly alter how artists make sense of information.

Sharing critique with those they have built relationships with is an enriching activity for these emerging artists. P1 explains that their previous studio space was not fertile ground for sharing ideas, however, they have formed a close sharing relationship with their newer studio partner. They “run through problems together” despite having very different painting styles:

... we still have exactly the same issues with our work. And there's times where I don't really like the decision he's made in the painting and I'll tell him, but a lot of the time when I know what I say to him isn't necessarily going to make him change the painting because he's got his own way of doing it.

P1 and their studio partner use each other as sounding boards and have developed a relationship where adopting critiques is both embraced and respectfully ignored. This ability of evaluating contributions of others in “participatory information environments” has been noted as important in academic IL (ACRL, 2015, p. 20), and as seen here, continues to develop informally outside of education. Critical understanding of their own work allows them to be astute when deciding when to adopt and reject input from others, building confidence in their practices.

Critique forms interpretative awareness of the collective field of art making; its histories, and its technical properties. It helps to inform opinions of their own successes or failures, and the successes or failures of their peers. P3, who regularly takes part in critiques within their studio, describes the symbiosis that occurs during critique:

I can feel when it's working and people can also feel like when it's working, which I think reinforces like your own belief in your ability to communicate via these things ... it's not just kind of totally trend based or totally subjective.

Garcia and Labatte (2015) argue that the ACRL IL threshold concept of “scholarship as a conversation” (p. 244) can be seen as a metaphor for studio critique. There is also evidence for how “stimulating conversation” (Buster & Crawford, 2010, p. 90) can build a vision for success for these emerging artists, with P4 stating, “the main way I'd measure success is like is just having interesting conversations...the worst thing is when no one has anything to say about it”.

The loss of studio critiques since leaving university was noted by P4, who has found it difficult to develop the same closeness they had with their classmates, saying “I think that's the difficulty as you're not around each other's work all the time with most people. You just see each other's work at shows and then that's not really a good environment for [critique].” As these emerging artists are no longer in formal education environments they must build spaces where critique can happen independently. The interviews, however, demonstrate that these do not necessarily have to be as formalised as they were in university. Critique sessions have shown to help artists “consider themselves not just [as] consumers of information and scholarship but also contributors and creators” (Garcia & Peterson, 2017, p. 76), so they can begin to place themselves within the wider profession of art.

#### 4.1.2. Sharing → pooling

Pooling is the act of “collectivising bits of information from a wider range of sources in order to gain a more comprehensive picture” (Lloyd, 2015, p. 1035), and can be utilised by emerging artists as they build an informed picture of their new environments. Emerging artists graduate into being mostly independent in their work. They are not, usually, protected by organisational structures (union membership, paid time off, holiday allowance) available in other work as they are often unrepresented by galleries and providing freelance services. As such, they form networks to build knowledge on their new working environments. The interviewees use their peers to access career guidance and culturally specific knowledge of their new places, evidencing “invisible colleges” (Mason & Robinson, 2011, p. 178).

Whilst critiquing was mostly experienced as a personal, in person, activity, pooling can be observed in digital environments. P4 explains how pooling with other artists has allowed them to build a picture of the cyclical nature of funding opportunities in their city, saying:

... but if I have a show that I really want to fund, so I need funding at a specific time, then I'll just ask friends and be like, “do you know of any funding that's going at the moment?”  
... Now I'm learning more and more what the ones that come up every year, and then go straight to them.

Pooling has been noted to “build a picture” of a new place where the “rules and regulations” may differ from previous environments (Lloyd et al., 2017, p. 9). For these artists, graduating means they are no longer being fed information through their university. All the interviewees moved to London after studying in other places, and thus, had to learn through pooling which new career opportunities were available to them. As these artists transition out of education, they begin to recontextualise their practices outside of just art and make connections with others working in creative fields. P2 describes the “cross comparing and pollinating” that happens when they discuss their work with actors and authors to learn how the themes of their practices are positioned in the wider creative zeitgeist. As the emerging artists build a picture of their new place of work and its cultural specificities; they can begin to engage with opportunities that are worth their limited time and money.

#### 4.2. Information practice → balancing

Emerging artists must balance multiple flows of information associated with their new roles and responsibilities. Hemmig (2009) has broadly categorised these multiple information channels into two; creative and administrative processes. Creative information processes are those that enrich the creative processes and administrative information processes are those attached to the management of being an artist (Hemmig, 2009). *Balancing* looks at how the emerging artists develop techniques to mediate these flows of information. This is expressed through the codes *managing*, *avoiding*, and *organising*.

##### 4.2.1. Balancing → managing

Managing is a decision-making process within balancing, wherein the emerging artists must prioritise their workflows due to the constraints of their, oft precarious, material conditions. Transition creates a time where people learn how to “connect with the sources of knowledge that will support this intensive period of change” (Hicks, 2020, p. 220), and this is true for emerging artists. The interviewees all noted the stresses of managing multiple streams of information when navigating their professional and creative lives. P2 passionately expresses the

feelings of un-control when thrust into an environment where they felt overwhelmed by their demands:

Last year was really my first year working independently from any institution as an artist and it was just so horrific. The constant mistakes and actual failures of just pricing your work and replying to emails and applying to competitions and getting rejected.

Here the problems P2 is encountering is not due to a lack of information, but rather, an unmooring associated with navigating information independently. This could be noted as transition induced information anxiety, or the “ever-widening gap between what we understand and what we think we should understand” (Wurman, 1989, p. 34). P2 monitors their responsibilities but fears a lack of understanding with this is being made more difficult due to their dyslexia.

The interviewees express discomfort in the responsibility of managing one's own career. P2 expressing they feel they are their own personal assistant and P3 saying emerging artists are expected to be a one man band. This could be a riskier environment than art school as there could be serious financial implications if they do not manage this information successfully. It must be noted that emerging artists are balancing the information connected to their practice whilst often maintaining other full-time or part-time work.

Furthermore, emerging artists are encountering, and expected to understand, multiple streams of information without the supervision that can be seen in other disciplines. Emerging artists have been described as the “epitome of the emerging independent practitioner” (Mason & Robinson, 2011, p. 160). With this, emerging artists develop managing techniques, including, sacrifice as to better balance responsibilities. P3 describes this management saying, “There are usually several things on the boil, but it becomes a case of, OK, this one has the most legs, so like we'll run with that.”

The emerging artists confront that they have limited time and resource to invest in every desire, and in turn, begin to weigh up what has “the most legs” and develop information around that. This forced development of new practices can lead artists to develop “alternative strategies” that are beneficial to them in the long-term (Steinbach, 2018, p. 60). P3 describes how their financial situation has led them to using cheaper materials. They note the positive effects of sacrificing certain aspects of their practice as these limitations forced them to reconsider how they communicate through their work. They state that, despite what material they use, the work needs to “facilitate whatever I'm interested in, or I want to learn about...I think I've probably made less [since leaving university], but I've done more of the things I'm more invested in”, evidencing the importance of a considered management of information, and even, sacrifice in emerging artistic practice.

#### **4.2.2. Balancing → avoiding**

Balancing also entails understanding when information needs to be avoided as to prioritise other sources and avoid the risk of being overloaded, where “we cease to pay prompt and careful attention to some of it” (Case & Given, 2016, p. 122). Whilst the interviewees resent aspects of the administrative processes some harness its potential. P1 expresses how they use administrative tasks to escape when a painting is not progressing as they want. P1 reasons that tasks such as proposal writing “uses a totally different part” of their brain and they do information activities such as this until all they want to do is “not look at a screen”. The emerging artists are building protective information practices to ensure they are in a headspace to make;

an act they do not fully understand in themselves but one in which they trust. P2 describes how avoidance is also self-preserving, describing the addictiveness of Instagram, they say:

On bad weeks where I'm really addicted... it feels almost like self-harm. I'm going to feed the demons. If I post or I will delete app for maybe like two or three days... It's being mindful, but definitely just like kind of assessing your boundaries with it and trying not to try not to like take it all so seriously.

Here, P2 is developing boundaries on when social media becomes a burden to their mental wellbeing, as well as embodied understanding of what this feels like as to possibly avoid it in the future.

There is a commonality between the interviewees with them using information avoidance as boundary setting to mitigate the risk of disturbing their artistic ideals. Both P3 and P4 express avoiding information around other artworks. P3 says that whilst they are making, looking at this information can lead to an oversaturation that is counterproductive. P4 also expresses how they avoid art theory during making:

It gets too meta for me ... I don't want to think about whether it's good or not ... I don't want to overanalyse it. I think it's more like it's probably more specific times and when I'm in the middle of making, I can't read that kind of thing. Other times I can if there's enough distance.

When the emerging artists avoid other artists' work, this could be seen as "avoid[ing] knowing in order to reduce anxiety" (Maslow, 1963, p. 122). The information is not stressful but the not knowing allows a clarity in their own work to persist unabated. P1 includes avoiding absorbing embodied knowledge from other artists also. They tell a cautionary tale of emerging artists who have worked as assistants for established artists stating "... you work for somebody else, and it's crazy how that other style can brush up on your own painting and kind of like sort like suck the life out of your own practice."

This, again, is an exercise in creating boundaries to mitigate the risk of the work being "watered down" (P1) from accumulating the embodied knowledge of others. These emerging artists have a trust in their creative abilities that they wish not to disrupt with certain information.

#### **4.2.3. Balancing → organising**

As the emerging artists encounter, search for, and accumulate information, they organise it over multiple mediums to reference in the future. This organisation is of information that they have flagged as potentially useful to their creative process, but they either do not need it immediately, or want to connect to other sources. As the emerging artists have expressed, they are particular on what information they want to reference when making. This organisational behaviour could present how artists prepare themselves for the making process.

The emerging artists view that their organisation practices are "definitely not formalised" (P4). This reflects other studies that show that artists view their information practices as chaotic when they could be viewed as multidisciplinary (Gendron, 2009). When asked to describe their practices all the artists showed sophisticated practices that organised their "sense-making" (Gendron, 2009, p. 27) and research across mediums. P4 expands on how they use these different mediums for different information and for different purposes:

A really, really long note in the Notes app on my phone. That has been going on for like over a year, probably two years ... and a sketchbook. [I am] just constantly absorbing information ... I also bookmark loads of stuff on an Internet browser .... The notes app ... is like distilled into a line of like what I find interesting or what might be the basis of a work.

Interestingly, P3 also uses the Notes app on their phone, alongside a sketchbook and Instagram's saving feature. They have a sketchbook they "feel quite attached to" but functionally their Notes app is the most useful. Furthermore, P2 shows how they take "sense-making" into their studio practice through photography and sketching:

I keep a sketchbook on me as I walk around the city or if I go to shows, and I take photograph components ... I'll either draw what I see around me, or I'll draw images that come into my mind, or if I hear a funny thing or read something. It is a very visual way of understanding and touching the world .... Images will come in and then I'll draw them down, and then I take that into my studio.

These artists have developed analytic skills in their "understanding and touching the world" (P2) to decide how information should be organised. Knowing when information is best organised through digital note taking, through a sketchbook, or through their camera roll shows acute understanding of their practices and of the information they are encountering. A sense of insecurity about their organisational skills may stem from the rigidity of proving process associated with art school assessment. P3 expresses their frustration with the traditional sketch booking needed during art school:

I was never someone that had like a pretty sketch book...There was never any actual kind of discussion of what role research played, so you were just expected to have these like folders of annotated research or like have image books .... Well, if the work is successful ... let's think about how I got there instead of saying "annotate more".

Whilst art school education must create frameworks to assess student progress, there looks to be an argument that art education is not reflecting how artists actually go on to work. Currently, the way student progress is assessed may lead to unnecessary feelings of failure as a new practitioner.

### **4.3. Information Practice → Feeding**

The third information practice is *feeding*, which describes the enriching information that the emerging artists engage with to further their making. This information is used as inspiration and as reasoning. Unlike other professionals, artists are not bound by information needing to be true for it to be useful. For example, P2 says, "every image is an opportunity". The interviewees seem almost perplexed on questions of where inspiration was found. Their answers are mostly unspecific, citing "literature" (P4), "films" (P1), "artist interviews" (P3), and "a certain outfit" (P2). When expanding on how this information is processed to feed their practices, trends begin to emerge. The two codes associated with *feeding* in this study are: *bingeing*, which expresses when artists use short bursts of information to contextualise their work and *looking*, wherein artists use their own "knowledge creation" (Hunt & Jennings, 2021, p. 33) as conversation for future enquiry.

#### **4.3.1. Feeding → Bingeing**

As the emerging artists traverse their multiple flows of information that inform their artistic practices, they engage in phases of bingeing information over short spaces of time to quickly find inspiration and stimulate art making. This behaviour could be an example of how information overload is paradoxical; whilst there are risks attached to having too much information, humans have a need for stimulation (Case & Given, 2016). Kuhlthau (1993) also posits that the failure to acquire new information leads to boredom, and from the interviews both P1 and P3 express a fear of stagnation within their practices. These bursts of bingeing could be seen as a mitigating behaviour as to avoid stagnation in their works. P1 expresses the process and reasoning of bingeing when they say:

I'll just watch a load of movies and lots of lots films...Listen to loads of new music and feed that like subconscious mind, which is perhaps not really full enough...Maybe what I do is like blast my eyeballs with as much screen time as possible, just to have that kind of weird archaic practice of coming to the studio and like moving wet slime on canvas, which is so silly when you think about it like it is such a dumb thing to be doing.

Here, P1 uses bingeing information to stay connected with the world whilst engaging in the “archaic” practice of painting, and possibly, keep an awareness of the potential vanity of art making.

Certain bingeing behaviours are almost innate in the platforms these emerging artists use and are often not positively received. P2 describes their Instagram habits as “uninspiring doom scrolling”. Meanwhile, P3 expresses that it is undeniable that their use of Instagram is a source of inspiration but it is often enacted through fast scrolling where they are consuming a lot of stimuli at once. P3 goes on to say:

I was taking in a lot of visual information, but not really thinking. Then in conversations with people, really struggling to think about what I'd actually seen...it was incredibly surface in the way that I was encountering it until I kind of like focused in a bit more.

P3 concludes that the risks of flooding themselves with “surface” information was not something to be avoided, but rather, better utilised. A theme of trust in themselves appears in all the interviews, with the emerging artists trusting that whilst these binges of information can be surface they feel that they will passively absorb the important parts. P4, when asked to explain how they process the information they encounter, said they rely on the information to “come back to me later”. P1 describes it as “feeding that subconscious [mind]”. This bingeing is not necessarily searching nor browsing, but rather allowing information to flow through them. Passively feeding oneself with information and trusting that this will inform their “dynamic process of perception and expression” (Cowan, 2004, p. 18) in ways they do not fully understand. Although the emerging artists' frantic consumption of information mitigates risks associated with stagnation it could also reinforce fast information behaviours that lead to not engaging in the information fully.

#### **4.3.2. Feeding → looking**

Looking, as seen in the interviews, is where the artists spend time with their own information. They use their own pieces of art to influence decision making in art making. Emerging artists have been shown to navigate “knowing and understanding” as they create physical works “as vehicles of understanding” (Hunt & Jennings, 2021, p. 51). This literature shows artists are knowledge creators themselves. Their time looking at their own works could be seen as self-referencing and can be observed when emerging artists begin to consider their works as bodies of work that accumulate, and converse with each other. The “looking closely and feeling” (Hunt

& Jennings, 2021, p. 51) that artists engage with in their own work also feeds creative decision making. P1 describes this looking for answers in their own work, saying:

There is no “oh, I know it's right when this adds up to that” ... it's more I just look at it. There's a certain balance where I can create some kind of chaos that is going to be able to sit right. That's what I'm looking for ... the moment it works is where there's a lot going on, but spatially through little devices of colours and shape, you're able to look at it without wanting to turn away.

This highlights how looking can fortify the development of their embodied practice. Here, looking closely at their own work (finding balance) bolsters their technical know-how (devices of colour and shape).

Similarly, looking at their own work is used by P2 when trying to work through stagnation, this includes, taking the work outside of their studio environment. P2 explains that they take photos of their work when they are leaving their studio, often to get home and view them and think “that is disgusting”. The act of taking the work into new space can lead to visceral responses that changes the course of the work. The emerging artists are also looking into their past practices to inform their current work, P2 explains this, saying:

I might not kind of work from a drawing I have done for, you know, a year or something, and then suddenly I'll be in the studio looking for ideas. And I'll kind of put it out and think, oh, there's something in that.

Looking back, the emerging artists see something new. P2 also expresses how the act of putting multiple ongoing works on the walls of their studios and looking at them closely leads to them being able to “converse with each other...you'll begin to see repetitions and figure something out”. This act of self-referencing is important in refining embodied skills of looking. This act of looking is also not immune to a feeling of overwhelming with P3 describing the need to “re-juice” with research after long periods of being with their own work.

## 5. Discussion

Emerging artists are entering a profession where the “rules are not made explicit” (Bourdieu, 1990, as cited in Hannigan, 2019, p. 173), and without these rules, artists must develop and construct “their own set of criteria” on what success and failure are to them (Hannigan, 2018, p. 173). At university, student artists are evaluated based on program standards. On the other hand, experienced artists may gauge their financial and critical success through their galleries, buyers, and critics. Emerging artists, however, are in transition; creating visions for what this future may or may not look like. Success and failure are subjective and in flux. This discussion takes four themes that emerged in the findings that expand on how these emerging artists' information practices lead to, or effect, how they construct the criteria of successfulness. These are: the process of unlearning canonical knowledge from previous education, building “self-understanding” (Gorichanaz, 2020, p. 691) by situating oneself in time, self-referencing as IL, and some effects of digital media environments on their information behaviours.

These discussions give evidence to the potentially unique information processes that happen during the transitional period after education, as emerging artists re-conceptualise what it means to be a successful artist alongside their other roles and responsibilities.

## 5.1 Unlearning

The findings show how the unlearning of knowledge that was canon within their previous educational environments informs the emerging artists' visions of success and failure they are forming during transition. This is built through pooling information on how other educational models differ from their experiences and developing a distrust of the information coming from those they previously looked to.

Firstly, P3 shows an example of creating an “invisible college” (Mason & Robinson, 2011, p. 178) with their peers, where they pieced together the different ways in which they were taught, to create a system that works for them:

You can kind of like pick and choose things more from other people's educations and which has been interesting .... People that did fine art opposed to sculpture, people that did film courses or people from design backgrounds. You take things for a given based off the way that you've been educated and then you realise when you're around other people, they're just like “What?” ... “We don't do that”.

Previous study showed a quarter of the emerging artists they surveyed were working in a different medium to what they studied due to “a general progression of ideas, and a desire to develop as an artist” (Mason & Robinson, 2011, p. 165). This, along with evidence from the interviewees on the productiveness of discussing their work with people of different disciplines, demonstrates the creative malleability of emerging artists in transition. As art students unlearn their education through cross-pollinating with their peers, they can reconstruct what their practice is to them. What this shows is how the successes of university are not a universal success in art making. Discovering that no educational model is a key to future success, they can now construct their own learning through other people's experiences.

Furthermore, the interviews bear witness to the emerging artists becoming cynical of the information that was fed to them during their university years. P1 describes developing distrust with canonical art information received from tutors and mid-career artists, and their realisation that this information is not necessarily productive to their practice:

What you come to realise is a lot of them [art educators] are just talking out their arse anyway .... You know that kind of spiel of like a mid-career artist, you know what they're going to say. You watch enough short films that the Tate make about artists you know the process now ... what we don't know is how it feels to be in it.

Whilst this information may have been useful or aspirational during university study, P1 feels now this information lacks the specificity they need, arguing, “I want to focus on my peers more”. As the body is a site for “encoded knowledge” learnt through “observing the body in action” (Lloyd, 2005, p. 86), the distance in experience between emerging artists and mid-career artists may become too large for this learning to take place.

## 5.2 Present and future

Another way that the artists form their concept of success is by considering their position in time and in relation to the experiences of other artists. Study has shown artists build the “self-understanding” needed to create bodies of work through “comparing the past self to the present self” (Gorichanaz, 2020, p. 691). In these findings, the interviewees used the present of others to build potential futures for themselves and mitigate risk.



The interviewees sought to place themselves in time using other artists experiences. Especially those whose careers were seen as slightly more advanced than them. This was used to ease their anxieties and provide career guidance as they navigate their transitional space and envision a successful future from their current precarity. P2 describes what they are searching and observing when looking to place themselves in time with other artists:

They've been showing for longer, have more attention, and their works are going for more. Possibly representation and a different level of respect .... It's just that understanding that there is something across the bridge. It could progress into a certain thing ... just something to work towards.

What can be observed is both the practicalities in this information they are searching for in other artists careers (representation, shows, price) as well as implicit information on a future that may be more secure. P4 also describes receiving similar advice from a fellow emerging artist, who suggested searching slightly more experienced artist CVs to work through being “stuck”. P4 elaborates on what they are looking for in this search:

They've had like their first show in a bigger gallery or something and he'll look through their CV and see the progression of what they've done and then think like “OK, maybe I'll apply to that thing next, or like focus on doing that”.

Again, we see emerging artists using the information from their community to mitigate the possible risks associated with transitioning out of education, whether that is applying to the same or similar funding opportunities or noting potential galleries. P4 even furthers by mentally placing themselves on the timeline of a CV, saying “I'm there on their CV... I can do that!”. This mirrors Hicks' (2020) noting of language learners using “sifting” (p. 214), where they are identifying core ideas of a setting through information to ground themselves in transitional spaces. Similarly, this observing of other artists and pulling of key information could be seen as mitigating risk to inform their present as well as create potential in a future. Whilst these artists are looking at this information chronologically, they are not looking for information on how to complete transition. Rather, it is a tool in “positioning the present” (Hicks, 2020, p. 218) informed by the past of others.

### **5.3 Self-referencing as IL**

Another theme from the findings is the importance of emerging artists spending time responding to their own information. This self-referencing, done over longer periods of time compared to university study, begins to lead the artists to making more interconnected bodies of work. This self-referencing is not fully considered in IL teaching or policy.

Emerging artists have been shown to navigate “knowing and understanding” as they create physical works “as vehicles of understanding” (Hunt & Jennings, 2021, p. 51). In this, we see that artists are knowledge creators. Intensely looking at their own works can be observed when emerging artists consider their works as bodies of work, that accumulate, and converse with each other. Important studies have explored what information emerging artists use (Mason & Robinson, 2011); an interest which might prompt a need for librarians to implement appropriate collection development policies for their users. This study presents the importance of “looking” in artistic practice and agrees with Cowan (2004) who notes how much of the information emerging artists engage with is self-referential. This embodied practice combines sense-making

and technical decision making, a unique intersection of tactic and learned processes that has not been widely considered previously.

Further exploration could explore how self-referencing could influence IL learning for art students, especially those preparing for graduation. ARLIS's Information Competencies have a spectrum of ideas; from traditional searching to "deep engagement" (ARLIS/NA, 2018, p. 25). Despite this, there is little on the importance of the information practices of artists engaging in their own information. Artists build the "self-understanding" through "comparing the past self to the present self" (Gorichanaz, 2020, p. 691), using their embodied and technical knowledge when confronted with problems in their work. The emerging artists' art, the dynamic information they create, is both introspective and communicative (Gorichanaz, 2020), and further enquiry on creating understanding (Cowan, 2004) would be beneficial for the field.

#### **5.4 Digital Media**

Findings from this study demonstrate that digital media plays a large role in the information practices for emerging artists. Whilst the art market understands the financial incentives of using platforms such as Instagram (Hiscox, 2021), the findings show that the relationships between the emerging artist, and digital publishing is both instructive and destructive.

All the interviewees mention Instagram as a central platform to find inspiration, market their work, and communicate with their peers. The findings of this study also highlight how it can become a site of perceived failure. The sense-making activities noted in the findings show that the design of these platforms impact their usefulness for the emerging artists. For example, P1's visceral reaction to seeing art online compared to in-person or P2's "doom scrolling". Whilst the information could be useful, the platforms' infrastructure creates an uninspiring response. Digital platforms will continue to be used by artists; however, IL teaching could better prepare students to engage with them. Beene and Statton Thompson (2022) investigate the benefits of "slow looking" using the Digital Image Guide (DIG) method; a set of questions specifically designed to help users critically respond to images on social media. Fast-moving information platforms have "flattened out contextual clues" that exist in legacy media (Beene & Statton Thompson, 2022, p. 15). Using the DIG method, students found that it helped them to be more "cognizant" to evaluate the images they encountered on social media platforms (Beene & Statton Thompson, 2022, p. 15). Bingeing lots of information over a short space of time is one aspect of the inspiration-drive process found in this study; interviewees show a trust that the most important information will hold. The DIG method, however, could have assisted the interviewees in "(re)discover[ing] interests and values" (Beene & Statton Thompson, 2022, p. 16), and enabled them to organise the information they come across on social media more effectively.

On the other hand, resilience building communities are also being formed on digital environments within the emerging artist community. The interviews giving examples of pooling activities between emerging artists and networked support through Instagram. Some pages include funding opportunities and career advice (Jobs Art, 2021), whereas others share community generated memes that satirise the challenges of being an emerging artist and skewer art establishment ideals. Whilst not traditional "pooling" behaviour, the media posted on these meme pages provides a space for artists to share their collective frustrations and formulate critique, for example, on the convoluted language used by galleries (Freeze Magazine, 2021). Emerging artists critiquing the pitfalls of their new environments could be identified as "collective coping" (Lloyd, 2015) where people share information with others in "meaningful, purposeful, and cultural congruent ways" (Kuo, 2012, p. 377) to create resilience within the group. The development of coping strategies during this transition position it "as a site

of struggle and conflict” (Hicks, 2020, p. 211), and this communities’ development of a new insular language, outside that of art establishment jargon, show the potential of coping strategies empowering new practitioners.

## 6. Conclusion

The paper observes three information practices of emerging artists, who in transition, are navigating their new roles outside of university and constructing the “criteria” (Hannigan, 2018, p. 173) of their success. *Sharing*; the ways in which artists ground themselves in their new environments through collectivised information through their community. This informs opinions that shape both their creative practices and career aspirations. *Balancing*; how artists prioritise and avoid information to mitigate the risks of being a new practitioner and form information behaviours that build resilience. And *feeding*; where artists search for, encounter, and process information that will inform their creative practices to avoid stagnation and contextualise their work. Their criteria building is seen in unlearning canonical knowledge from their educations and placing themselves in time through the bodies of others. Furthermore, all interviewees point to their complex relationships to digital media platforms that may, unduly, shape how they perceive themselves.

The sample size of the study is small, and as such, not generalisable. The discussions and findings in this paper, however, could point to areas of further study. Insights into the balancing practices of emerging artists could point to how art education could better reflect how artists go on to organise the information they are encountering. And IL practitioners could use this as example for the need to engage art students in the practice of failing and experimentation before transition.

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## 8. Declarations

### 8.1 Ethics approval

Ethics approval was granted by University College London's Research Ethics Committee.

## 8.2 Funding

Not applicable

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## 9. Appendix: Interview Questions

The interviews were semi-standardised, as such, not all the questions were asked verbatim. The bullet pointed questions were prompts for the interviewer and not necessarily asked.

Tell me a bit about your artistic practice? What does a day of working look like for you?

Where do you get information from?

- Inspiration?
- Technical?
- Administrative?

What do you constitute as a success related to your artistic practice?

- Do you measure this through monetary gains? Peer-support? Publicity and public recognition? Self-satisfaction?
- Has this changed since university, if so, how?

What do you constitute as a failure in your artistic practice?

- What is failure to you?
- How do you evaluate failure?
- Do you measure this through monetary losses? Peer-support? Publicity and public recognition? Self-satisfaction?
- Has this changed since university, if so, how?

Do you have strategies for working through failure?

- For example, if something is not working, how do you know when to move on? And what do you do to move on?
- How do you know when you have 'broken through'?
- What does this feel or look like?
- How did you develop these strategies?

Have there been any times where you feel overloaded with information when working through an idea/ plan?

- How does this make you feel?
- When you feel you have 'too much'?
- How do you organise or curate your ideas?
- Are there times when you avoid certain information?
- Using the admirative process as a tool to 'organise' wider?

Have you noticed when information makes you uninspired?

- Do you have strategies you employ in this circumstance?
- Are there any places you 'go' for inspiration?
- Or what do you do to find inspiration?

What communities are you in to discuss your failures and successes? Or even your process more widely?

- WhatsApp Groups, Instagram, critiques, Twitter?
- What role do these groups play within your artistic practice and/or success/failure?
- Have you noticed shifts in how you respond to failure as technology has changed?

Does your process change when you have a place for the work to go?

- Commissioned vs general practice?
- Does this change how you think about failure/ success?

Do you look to experienced artists/ role models, for strategies?

- Why do you consider these people successful?
- Do you look to individual artists and their processes when you are working through something you don't think worked?
- Are these 'role models' work like yours in form/ material/ theme?

Do you think about the possible moral failings in response to your work?

- How will the audience respond to the themes in your work?
- Do you discuss this with your communities?

Has the way you respond to failure changed over time?

- Did you learn these strategies at university, your own trial and error, a mix of both?
- What do you think has been the most important for yourself?

Do you have any closing thoughts on anything we have spoken about? Or something that has not been covered yet?