

HACS dissertation  
Word count 7,980

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October 2007  
M.A Printmaking

# What informs the practice Of the professional working artist?

## What informs the practice of the professional working artist?

I have posed the above question in order to try identify what it means to be a professional working artist. Instead of using books and articles already written, I decided to try to work from original sources as much as possible. Working directly from interviews would, I hoped, give me a better understanding of the artist of today and a more realistic overview of the demands and influences on a professional working artist in today's society. Using my own interviews meant I used first hand material, the method best suited to my line of enquiry. Existing material (published interviews, films, documentaries, books) can at best only be second hand information. I created a list of questions and broke the 'art market' down into simple categories: the professional working artist, the facilitator and the buyer. My interviews steered me through the dissertation and underpinned its structure.

In the context of this essay the professional working artist is: *professional as opposed to amateur i.e. one who makes a living via art as opposed to one who engages in the activity for pleasure. Artist: one who practices an art. Art: human skill as opposed to a product of nature.*

I know I do not do full justice to such an ambitious question. However, I have endeavoured to source relevant figures from each section of the art market and interviewed them on film. (CD enclosed).

I wanted to give a balanced view of the art world so chose to interview figures ranging from established artists who have followed a traditional route from the very beginning of their career (Donald Hamilton Fraser RA) to artists who come from a non-establishment basis, with no formal training and rely on different influences (Carolyn Blake).

I chose to interview; Donald Hamilton Fraser, Liz Butterworth, Tom Hammick, Sheilagh Jevons, Carolyn Blake.

I will expand on each of these artists and their particular practices later.

In my quest I can only hope to begin to examine the questions and untangle the issues involved in the working life of a professional working artist. Such a small sample from such an enormous industry cannot hope to be representative. However, from the anecdotal evidence that I have gathered it is apparent that there are ideas and issues which were common to all of my interviewees.

As an artist myself I wanted to address two issues in particular: the motivation of an artist to create an artwork and how their work resonates with an audience. How does an artist translate their personal experiences and interests into a vehicle which will allow someone else to empathise with its subject, narrative or atmosphere? To elucidate this it was imperative to speak to artists in the present. By examining their responses I hoped to be able to analyse these quandaries and develop some useful (if tentative) insights.

I felt it was imperative that I also interviewed gallerists, facilitators (foundry owners) and collectors/buyers.

A brief synopsis of each follows.

The gallerists interviewed were, Rebecca Hossack, owner and founder of The Rebecca Hossack Galleries, London W1 and Bridget Fraser, owner and founder of Barn Galleries, Henley-on-Thames, RG9. These two galleries have both been established for nearly two decades but the location of the actual physical spaces dictates a different approach to the kind of artist they represent.

Both galleries show a mixture of what could be termed eclectic work. Hossack, being in the centre of London is known for a wilder portfolio of artists. Being at the hub of the London media world means she can access the clientele necessary to support this more leftfield work.

Barn Galleries, being situated in the Home Counties caters for private rather than corporate buyers.



Barn galleries - a rural place



Rebecca Hossack - an urban space.

The facilitator and gallerist I approached was Rungwe Kingdon of the Pangolin Art Foundry and Gallery, Stroud. This is predominantly a bronze casting foundry. They are responsible for casting most of our monumental sculpture today as well as running a small gallery and representing some of Britain's best known sculptors such as Lynn Chadwick.

The collectors I interviewed included; Peter Millican of Parabola Land and Robert Hiscox of Hiscox Insurance.

Peter Millican is a property developer who has been described as an idealist. He has shown foresight by buying work by the late Kenneth Armitage for his headquarters in Newcastle (situated outside Northern Arts) and by his visionary development with the help of architects Dixon Jones in the construction of Kings Place, the re-development of Kings Cross, which will open in 2008.

Kenneth Armitage 'Reach for the stars'



Coincidentally Kings Place will include a gallery co-ordinated by Rungwe Kingdon of Pangolin.

Robert Hiscox is not only a private collector but oversees the public art collection of Hiscox. Their collection rivals companies such as BP although Hiscox now try to support young aspiring artists through a public space in their headquarters in EC1, in the middle of the financial hub of London.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Hiscox, Robert & McDonald, Elliot Hiscox selected works (second collection 2006-2007)*

The money and the market.



## The money and the market.

The life of a professional working artist is a lucky and tainted choice at the same time. Unlike other professions such as a doctor or surveyor, the professional route one takes is less defined. The grey areas can cause much confusion especially in the early stages. The first five years of a professional working artist's life are often the hardest.<sup>2</sup> Adjusting to the rhythms of your own working life and having to produce work often without even an inkling of an outlet or market, the early years can see an individual feeling like one who is going backwards as they rely on family assistance and support.

Firstly I will address the financial aspects of being a professional working artist and how today's financial climate influences the art world and ultimately the artist. To do this I will outline the framework of the art world of today. Financially the professional working artist often struggles and needs a secondary source of income.

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<sup>2</sup> Lydiate, Henry 2004 <http://www.artquest.org.uk/artlaw/contracts/28572.htm>

The Arts Council of Great Britain reported;

*People directly employed in cultural occupations are half as likely to claim state benefits than those in other areas of employment – 4 % against 8 %. The proportion of people working beyond statutory retirement age in cultural occupations is twice that of those in non-cultural occupations. People in cultural occupations are three times more likely to be self-employed than those in non-cultural occupations – 39 % compared with 12 %. Among the self-employed, people in cultural occupations are twice as likely to have a second job than people in non-cultural occupations – 10 % compared with 5 %. While those in cultural employment receive above overall average earnings, their earnings are generally substantially less than similarly qualified professionals working in other fields.<sup>3</sup>*

The value of artists in today's society is reinforced by statements by government representatives such as Peter Hewitt, (who was then the Arts Council Chief Executive) stating:

*The arts are a growing source of employment and an increasingly important part of our economy. Just in terms of hard economics, people working in the arts and culture contribute more to society than they take out – and that's before taking into account their positive and transforming impact on the quality of life in this country. <sup>4</sup>*

Many artists start their careers relying on state benefits. With the demise of grants and subsidies, the majority of students leave formal training with such huge debts that the future for professional working artists may be bleak.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/pressnews/press\\_detail.php?rid=10&id=108&page=7](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/pressnews/press_detail.php?rid=10&id=108&page=7)

<sup>4</sup> As above

The student loan company showed that in 2006/07 the total loans to UK students was £18 billion<sup>5</sup>. Being an artist, especially a fine artist demands that one spends time working and developing work. Spending time means having money. With debts to pay it becomes harder to continue in this profession. Tessa Jowell (who was then the Minister for Culture) *has cited the advantage of valuing and supporting artists in their own terms*<sup>6</sup>.

It is unfortunate that these beliefs are not supported by actions. Art funding has been in decline. The fact that our governmental title reads *The Department of Culture, Media and Sport* does rather belie the above statement.

Despite the financial hiccups which can arise, being an artist is still a very democratic profession. Unlike many professions, being an artist is living as a person in a raw state, the profession gives you nothing to hide under. There are no pieces of software to cover mistakes, no sheltering under the corporate umbrella to help one to escape personal scrutiny. Anyone can be an artist if they have talent, put in the work and are prepared to expose themselves to the world at large.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.slc.co.uk/pdf/slcsfr012007.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/pressnews/press\\_detail.php?rid=10&id=108&page=7](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/pressnews/press_detail.php?rid=10&id=108&page=7)

The role of the artist has become even more complex as the arts have expanded into a colossal industry but, equally, this has given rise to more opportunities.

There are more people experiencing the arts than ever before. With the opening of large institutions such as Tate Modern, (over 4.9 million visitors in 2006 making it the second most popular tourist attraction in Britain,)<sup>7</sup> art is more accessible than ever before.



This is a positive and exciting development for artists but also rather daunting. Which direction to take when there are so many paths open to one can be confusing.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.tate.org.uk/>

However it is evident that:

*The majority of artists nowadays operate in a "mixed economy" ... sales of artwork sit alongside sales of skills and services to various clients, and fees and grants for research and consultancy. Although public exhibitions are vital to an artist's standing in the art world and provide routes to the commercial galleries, artists' income from them in terms of public exhibition fees has diminished over the years.<sup>8</sup>*

The rise of The Young British Artist in 2002 highlighted a new wave of work and also rocked the traditional view of the artist hidden away in a garret living on the breadline. The art dealer Charles Saatchi had been buying work from young Goldsmiths Art College artists. In 2003 mounted a show with over 35 artists on show.<sup>9</sup>

Peggy Guggenheim



I use the term dealer rather than collector for Saatchi as he, like Peggy Guggenheim<sup>10</sup>, made a public show of their collection which influenced the market and inevitably influenced the work artists were making. The work was completely new and brought with it a storm of media attention.

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/pressnews/press\\_detail.php?rid=10&id=108&page=7](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/pressnews/press_detail.php?rid=10&id=108&page=7)

<sup>9</sup> Kent, Sarah. *Shark Infested Waters: The Saatchi Collection of British Art in the 90's*. Zwemmer, London, 1994 (p6)

Damien Hirst who was in the words of Sarah Kent '*the wild boy whose shock tactics and cool media manner... gave art a high profile and a bad name*'<sup>11</sup> was the key figure in this new movement. Hirst had taken the initiative and mounted several exhibitions showcasing his and other fellow students work. It was a wonderful awakening for the art world in Britain but also gave young aspiring artists an attitude of making work which was provocative, topical and often shocking.



Damien Hirst

Away from the Flock, 1994

©Damien

<sup>10</sup> Gill, Anton. *Peggy Guggenheim, The Life of an Art Addict*. Harper Collins, London, 2001 (pp318-321)

<sup>11</sup> Kent, Sarah. *Shark Infested Waters: The Saatchi Collection of British Art in the 90's*. Zwemmer, London, 1994 (p6)

The price that much of this work fetched was unprecedented in the career of a young artist. Historically such figures had only ever been attained after the artist was dead or after a long career. It skewed the market and gave other young artists ridiculous financial aspirations.

In general, being an artist does not equate to being rich. The power of the dealer became apparent in Saatchi. If he said it was hot, it sold. The contemporary art world was ignited by this brave, new movement and the energy has continued to grow.

There is an argument that gone are the days of the mainstream art world where young artists could reflect back on past art movements and their work be directly influenced by major artists such as Matisse or Picasso. Instead they are left in a fragmented world in '*a great delta of pools and tributaries....There is no longer a clear development.*' *DHF*<sup>12</sup> Only time can tell whether this is true. (With hindsight the path may become clear.)

As our own economy has flourished so has the desire for luxury, and art, as the ultimate status symbol, epitomises the cachet of ownership that the acquisitive society so desires. In the words of Clement Greenberg, the Marxist critic, the artist's connection to the buyer represents '*an umbilical cord of gold*<sup>13</sup>. Financially, the art world appears to be a very healthy industry today.

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<sup>12</sup> Donald Hamilton – Fraser, Artist. Interview at the artist's home, Henley-on-Thames, Oxon. 06.08.07

<sup>13</sup> P. Mattick, *Art and its time: theories of practices of modern aesthetics*. Routledge press, London 2003 (pp24)

Now the revenue is coming from a different source. It is not the Church commissioning pictures as in the past, it is not government support of young artists, it is the private sector. Gone are the days where we would have a print of the river Thames on our wall. Today art is available to all. There are millions of artists working today in so many different mediums. The way it is presented and how it is sold has changed dramatically.

Many galleries are selling through art fairs. These democratic venues buzz with activity and they are everywhere. There is still a strong gallery presence in every city in Britain. London has a plethora of galleries in the traditional haunts such as Cork St as well as many new galleries in the East End. Art fairs may not have the high brow atmosphere that one used to associate with the gallery, (a quiet and reverential space reserved for the cognoscenti), but the art fairs have arrived. Art is everywhere, Art is for everyone.

This summer even saw The National Gallery reproducing paintings from its permanent collection and hanging them all over Soho and Covent Garden. The way art is used as a commodity cannot be overlooked and even such an inspired idea as this cannot be seen as a purely social gesture. The images were reproduced by <sup>14</sup>Hewlett Packard. This was clearly stated on plaques alongside the reproductions so the marketing opportunity it created for another giant corporation was abundantly clear. Art is undeniably big business. This can of course be of direct benefit

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<sup>14</sup> Jacobson, Howard 'What a splendid summertime treat: strolling through Soho with Caravaggio by your side' *The Independent on Sunday* (12 August 2007)



to the artist but inevitably opens up a range of problematic questions. It is now up to the individual to judge the merit of a work. Being one's own junk filter is a process we are becoming more accustomed to with the rise of the daily use of the internet – a completely unregulated source of information.

Even though art fairs hopefully maintain a high standard of work, their motivation is selling space. They are large commercial ventures they have to pay. Of course being a dealer has always had to be financially viable, but being an arbiter of taste to a select group of individuals is becoming more obsolete. The competition has become fierce. Art Fairs have existed for a long time. In the past they were more as a show of exhibits rather than as opportunities for the relatively unknown artist. Art Fairs in the past have shown artists representing their nation who have been selected by very established galleries, or their Arts Councils. The Venice Biennale (every two years) is in its 52nd year, Documenta (every five years) and Munster in Germany are also very well established but these are very different entities and are increasingly merging with what can only be called the art supermarket fairs. Art Basel<sup>15</sup> (every June) in Germany and The Frieze Art Fair (every October) in London have become the places to be seen and the venues to buy at. Frieze anticipated sales of <sup>16</sup> £100 million of work over a few days. The London auction houses benefit immensely from renowned fairs such as Frieze and often make sure their modern art sales coincide with the big fairs.

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<sup>15</sup> Pitman, Joanna 'A Very private View'. *The Times magazine supplement* (11 August 2007)

<sup>16</sup> Johnson, Andrew 'Frieze:the coolest party in town'. *The Independent on Sunday* (7 October 2007)

The global economic changes have also brought a great change and a surge of financial support for the dealers and in turn the artist. Art is a luxury but it is an integral luxury. From the Stone Age and before there are signs of man's creativity. Creativity is what separates man from beast.

Without the buyers/collectors of art the majority of artists could not exist. Without these collections, public and private, the majority of us would not be privy to the wealth of art that is and has been created. The age of the patron has gone in many ways but a new wave of collectors and this new wave of selling work via art fairs and auction houses has created new patrons. The world has opened up rapidly and changed so radically in recent years and with the collapse of The Soviet Union and communism and the opening up of communist China a flood of new buyers and makers has emerged. Artists emerging from China are becoming increasingly more prominent, Saatchi will be opening his new gallery in Chelsea next year with a collection of Chinese contemporary art<sup>17</sup>. The Russian billionaire oligarchs who acquired their wealth in the post communist era of the 1990's, have brought a flood of money into the art market too and created a booming development in art sales at auction houses. Sotheby's sold the collection of Mstislav Rostropovich (Cellist) for over £20 million pounds in September this year<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Kennedy, Maev 'Free for all Saatchi's pledge for new art gallery' *Guardian* (14 August 2007)

<sup>18</sup> Johnson, Andrew 'Rostropovich's art hoard to fetch £20m' *The Independent on Sunday* (12 August 2007)

The rise of India as an economic power has seen the art market in India rocket (300% increase in 2006).<sup>19</sup> A recent sale at Bonham's in Bond St, London; pictures were even withdrawn as they did not reach the astronomical prices that the work commands in their mother land.

The other phenomenon in the world of recent collectors has been the rise of the “celebrity collector”. The development of the cult of the celebrity over the past decade means we have seen the singers Elton John and George Michael becoming serious collectors, even being labelled by some as the ‘new Medici’s’.<sup>20</sup> They are building their own galleries for their astounding private collections and in some cases are out bidding public galleries for artworks. The voracity with which large investors are buying into the contemporary art market is exciting. Hedge fund managers invest on average over £2 million per year on fine art <sup>21</sup>and popularity of the art fund, part of the stock market, is incredible. These investments are in established and for the most part ‘dead’ art. None the less, the knock on effect for artists working today and the general publics’ acceptance of art as part of the everyday can only be positive.

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<sup>19</sup> <http://in.rediff.com/money/2005/aug/22spec.htm> & <http://www.ecademy.com/node.php?id=74359>

<sup>20</sup> Johnson, Andrew ‘Rostropovich’s art hoard to fetch £20m’ *The Independent on Sunday* (12 August 2007)

<sup>21</sup> Reyburn, Scott ‘£220m heatwave: ‘A June week in London’ *Antique Trade Gazette* (7 July 2007)

This leads us onto Robert Hiscox one of my interviewees. Robert Hiscox is chairman of Hiscox insurance.

*‘Hiscox believes in supporting initiatives that encourage and inspire collectors at all levels to build their own unique collections.’<sup>22</sup>*



Hiscox established a corporate art collection thirty seven years ago although he has been collecting privately for forty one years. Hiscox has a link to the art fund, something that Robert Hiscox frowns upon. To buy art as a commodity where you the buyer has had no control over the work selected and bought seems peculiar. However, as observed by Robert Hiscox, *‘art has always been a traditional store of value and if you’re very rich and you want to have a bit of this and a bit of that then they think the art will be safer than other things.’<sup>23</sup>*

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<sup>22</sup> Hiscox, Robert & McDonald, Elliot *Hiscox selected works* (second collection 2006/2007)

<sup>23</sup> *Robert Hiscox*, Collector. Interview at Hiscox head office, London. (10.08.07)

Being a large company with shareholders, the emphasis at Hiscox is on profit so the initial corporate collection was built up of Modern British artists including artists such as Lucien Freud and Francis Bacon. The collection began in the 1970s, after the death of Robert Hiscox's father, when they were able to buy work that would not have been the usual office art work. The Modern British artists may not have been the most traditional choice of artwork for office staff to look at whilst working but it soon became apparent to the company, from the attention of institutions such as The National Collectors Art Fund and an invitation to be part of the New Patrons exhibition at Christies, that this could not only be great for staff morale but also could grow into a wonderful investment opportunity as well as a great marketing tool. The reality of investing in Modern British artists was that there had already been a period of at least thirty years to filter out the non-runners and so the investment in these works was quite safe.

True to their word Hiscox continued to build up a stunning collection which was sold in 1998 to be replaced by a collection of young aspiring artists. Investing in contemporary art is not such a predictable game but Robert Hiscox has had a personal interest all his life in art. On all his company documents about investment in art and the Hiscox art projects is the phrase *'Art is a passion of mine. It is also an integral part of the culture of Hiscox. We insure it; we own it and we encourage it.'*<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.hiscoxartprojects.com/>

Hiscox do market themselves as the innovators of contemporary art. They promote the feel-good factor of helping people with company statements such as the one below relating to the arts projects:

*The Hiscox 's Art Projects launched in 2003 with the opening of regular public exhibitions of contemporary art in the heart of the City of London. Hiscox Art Projects supports and represent talented artists by providing them with travel bursaries and residencies, exhibitions, art fairs, projects in independent spaces and touring shows within Europe. All mediums such as painting, sculpture, film, photography and performance are covered by the project.<sup>25</sup>*

Their collection is yet again enormous and includes names such as; Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin, Mark Quinn, Mark Wallinger, John Virtue and Cecily Brown. Hiscox admits that it is easier to buy “dead art” but also sees the need to help living artists and enjoys having a personal connection with the maker and actually knowing the artists.

Having direct contact with an artist gives the work provenance and that is a valuable asset on many levels. I also got the impression that Robert Hiscox enjoys the philanthropist aspect of buying young artists’ work. This is something which became quite apparent when talking to the other interviewees who in some way support living artists. Art does bring out the philanthropist in people more than any other field.

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.hiscoxartprojects.com/>

Rungwe Kingdon and Bridget Fraser have both spearheaded projects in the third world. Rungwe with the development of The Ruwenzori Sculpture foundation in Uganda in 2006,<sup>26</sup> a foundry and gallery exchange programme, and Bridget with the launch of Artspace India in 2002, a residential exchange programme near to Calcutta in India<sup>27</sup>. Neither of these projects is financially rewarding but both give creative people in all fields the space, time and support that are so crucial to the development of a creative life and body of work.

Everybody that participated in this study, even such a financially focused figure such as Hiscox, definitely felt they were enriching their own lives and the lives of those around them. When asked whether Hiscox could buy an artwork he didn't like (purely for investment) the answer was no. When discussing the process of selecting work he said:

*'First of all it's heart and mind, the heart, first of all you see something and it gives you a buzz, secondly you've got to be able to afford it, so lets face it money comes into it and if it's cheap it gives you the ability to buy it. Will it go on in value, I must say if I am going to spend money, I do, I mean ephemeral art, things that are going to fall apart over time, I do admire, but I want the things I buy to be there for future generations. I don't tend to like badly made things like, Tracey Emin's bed, I would never dream of buying it. I'm afraid I don't like conceptual art. If I want brain I'll read philosophy, if I want video I'll watch Steven Spielberg,'<sup>28</sup> R.H*

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<sup>26</sup> Ruwenzori Sculpture Foundation (catalogue) Pangolin Gallery

<sup>27</sup> Artspace India – The Artspace Residency 2005 (leaflet)

<sup>28</sup> Robert Hiscox, Collector. Interview at Hiscox head office, London. 10.08.07

Peter Millican also responded in a similar vein illustrating that selecting art really is an internal process rather than a cerebral choice. He sees art as part of a civilised society and something that gives pleasure. He did not think that it was good to view art as a commodity. Why we respond to particular pieces of art and how we discover a connection with them we will discuss later but everyone I met or read about during this examination agreed that art is essential to the completeness of the whole.

One interviewee, the artist Sheilagh Jevons, summed it up well in her response when she stated;

*Without 'culture' our identity is weakened. Art allows us to be in touch with 'emotion' that represents the profoundness/awesomeness of being an amazing human being that is just extraordinary.* <sup>29S.J</sup>

The fact that Hiscox recognises the need for art and believes that it enriches our lives '*everyone is raised by a decent environment*'<sup>30</sup> is something which is widely recognised but difficult to prove in scientific terms. We have seen art used in hospitals and clinics and they are known to have a positive affect on patients but I have not come across a particular study that clarifies the direct link between visual stimulus and healing.

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<sup>29</sup> Carolyn Blake, Artist. Interview at the artist's studio, Hereford. 14.08.07

<sup>30</sup>Robert Hiscox, Collector. Interview at Hiscox head office, London. 10.08.07

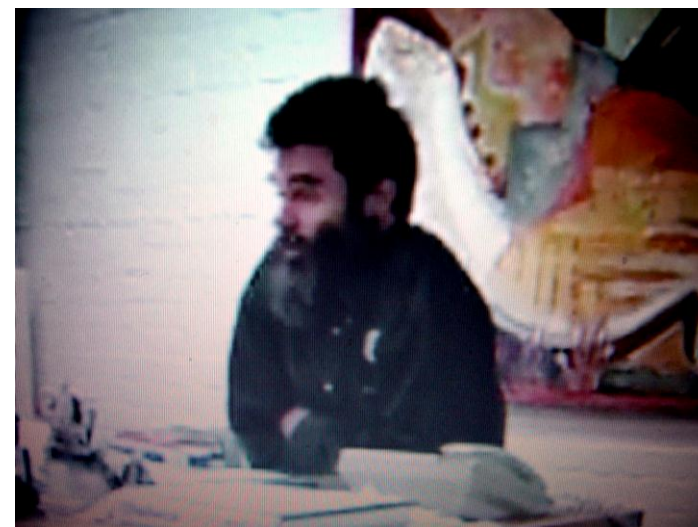


When we spoke about the need of talent versus the question of nepotism and/or good marketing as a point of access for success Hiscox response was *'I have always tritely said it is 50% hype and 50% talent but often I think it is 90% hype.'*<sup>31</sup> If we compare this belief to Rungwe Kingdon and our two gallerists we interviewed it becomes evident that talent wins through in the end but the actual process of creating is paramount for without the ideas and beliefs taking physical form we have nothing. In discussion with Rungwe Kingdon of Pangolin on the subject of nepotism he was quick to acknowledge the assistance in the building of his foundry and its reputation by the casting of the successful sculptor, Lynn Chadwick. This is beyond nepotism. It works on a natural rhythm of word of mouth, and something that Bridget Fraser of Barn Galleries also acknowledges when analysing where her new clients come from.

When Rungwe launched the Ruwenzori Sculpture foundation he had a lot of publicity due to the fact that Damien Hirst and Angus Fairhurst went with Rungwe to visit the project. Hirst casts his sculpture at Pangolin and it is a happy accident rather than aggressive marketing that publicity was created.

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Rungwe Kingdon



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<sup>31</sup> Robert Hiscox, Collector. Interview at Hiscox head office, London. 10.08.07

Rungwe has a very clear attitude to his working life. Again art was a passion from childhood and after recognising that he was not an artist but a maker he concluded that:

*there is something about a collective of a community of people who are geared to making something happen. It's a bit like the excitement of being a player in an orchestra... there is a great dynamism to being one of the team and what you make together, you can't make it on your own.. It's also something to do with the limitations being fairly contained so that what you do within those limitations will be to the fullest expanse of it and I am not a person who is very good with endless limitations.<sup>32</sup> R.K*

The difference in being an artist rather than a facilitator is made clear by this statement. Artists have no limitations or guidelines in their creations. Even when working to commissions as in the case with one of the artists interviewed, Liz Butterworth, your interpretation and style is dictated by your own hand. This is a disturbing yet exhilarating state, it creates a feeling of frustration and freedom at the same time and as Rungwe points out later on in the discussion about what art is:

*it is what defines us and I think artists are these strange quite rare people I think many of us are artistic but, I think an artist is actually quite a rare person in any one generation and they sort of interpret our age in a way, in a visual way that everybody can understand but its because art is non-verbal.<sup>33</sup> R.K*

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<sup>32</sup> Rungwe Kingdon, Facilitator-foundry and gallery owner. Interview at Pangolin Foundry and Gallery, Stroud, Gloucestershire. 29.09.07

<sup>33</sup> Rungwe Kingdon, Facilitator-foundry and gallery owner. Interview at Pangolin Foundry and Gallery, Stroud, Gloucestershire. 29.09.07

That art is such a powerful way to communicate, to be able to communicate yourself in an emotional way through a visual stimulus is an incredible feat. Consider that the first thing we do when we are born is open our eyes and see our mother. Such is the power of visual sensibilities.

Many of my interviewees pointed out how creative each individual. We need to make our spaces aesthetically pleasing, to enhance our environment with decoration is something that is irresistible. Man is a creative animal and for all documented time has created:

*Food is as nutritious eaten from a paper bag as it is served on a garnished platter; houses house us whether they are decorated or not; a building serves its function even when its design is basic. And yet, man strives to create an environment which does more than please the eye and, in so doing, satisfies a deeper need, an inner eye.*<sup>34</sup>

Bridget Fraser of Barn Galleries.

When discussing how both our gallerists select artists it was not the high flying names of today that drew them or necessarily artists that they believed would sell well but the originality of the artist, one who speaks with their own clear voice.

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<sup>34</sup> Bridget Fraser, Gallerist. Written correspondence from Henley, Oxon. (responded to sent interview questions.) July 2007

Finding your own voice takes time and practice and a lot of reflection. Bridget Fraser wrote in her response to my questions: *'The one thing that is important is artistic integrity. The successful artist will always work with integrity and be true to himself and make the work to the best of his ability.'* <sup>35</sup>

When discussing the pros and cons of marketing yourself as an artist versus having a dealer, with gallerists and artists alike the conclusive answer was that it was preferable to have a dealer. Many artists never have a dealer to promote or sell their work and especially during the early years of practice have to rely on their own initiative for sales. This can comprise of selling via their studio, hiring spaces or selling directly to clients from home or the internet. How to get a dealer is another subject and comes with its own rocky path to navigate but even with the rise of the internet being used as a marketing tool to promote and sell work an artist's time needs to be spent making if they are serious about making a living from their work. Building an honest relationship with your dealer, being clear about both of your aims, expectations and objectives is a prerequisite.

We are such a mobile society today, we buy wherever we please so it more urgent than ever to retain and develop one's relationships with one's clientele. If this part of the job is up to the artist it must surely take away hours if not entire days in the week just trying to respond to clients, titivate the website, organise shows, design the invitations - all before you even pick up a pencil.

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<sup>35</sup> Bridget Fraser, Gallerist. Written correspondence from Henley, Oxon. (responded to sent interview questions.) July 2007

The internet was a subject that I expected would bring about a great deal of change in the art world. However, all the galleries I spoke to just saw it as another form of Yellow Pages, an easy way for people to get information about your gallery. The artists didn't place any emphasis on it at all. All galleries have had sales via the internet but not without a previous personal contact or viewing. The result surprised me as a lot of artists use the internet in the hope of promoting their work but in reality how can you really buy a piece of work on-line. A picture or sculpture cannot communicate what it can in the flesh however good the screen is. The internet is a good tool, a quick way of communicating and sourcing information but is not the best way to sell artwork. I would not go so far as to agree with Donald Hamilton Fraser who states '*it is the work of the devil*'.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Donald Hamilton – Fraser, Artist. Interview at the artist's home, Henley-on-Thames, Oxon. 06.08.07

The artists and the work.

## The artists and the work.

Donald Hamilton Fraser RA is an artist who has followed the happy path of always having had a dealer; he started his career with a solo show in 1953 at Gimpel Fils, London, very soon after completing his training at St Martin's School of Art, London. The Gimpel brothers were his dealers at that time and carried artists such as Anthony Caro, Alan Davie and Lynn Chadwick.



The two images below illustrate Donald's two passions; abstracting the landscape ('Flying Kites') and the ballet ('Dancer in Class'). Donald would spend weeks sketching the dancers and the ballet became a life long fascination.

*'Flying Kites'*



*© D. Hamilton Fraser*

*'Dancer in Class'*



*© D. Hamilton Fraser*



Donald has continued to follow his own painting passions. He has not been led by the market but developed a wonderful following. Today his early paintings are again in demand.<sup>37</sup> Donald has made a living from his painting all his life, something which most artists aspire to and never achieve. This reinforces the need for a dealer to give you time to actually make the work. Donald was a visiting tutor at the Royal College of Art, London, one day a week, for twenty five years. This never provides a sizeable income, only a supplementary one but continuing to be part of the academic art world can only be a benefit. Tom Hammick and Liz Butterworth also teach in universities and art colleges. Apart from the financial help it keeps you stimulated, being alone in your studio everyday can be a lonely state. Tom said of his teaching;

*‘I teach now one day a week, I used to teach four or five days a week ... Teaching is fantastic and it brings in a basic income but as I don’t have a private income.... it is important that I sell my work.’*<sup>38</sup> T.H

For all of the artists interviewed *‘the reality of being a professional working artist is that you try and work every day’* L. Butterworth.<sup>39</sup>

When we discussed what drove them to produce work the answer was, as Donald said when he quoted Braque, “yes I’m a painter... C’est Mon metier... it’s what I do.’ This comment was reinforced again and again over the interviews, some people are farmers, some are carpenters and some are artists.

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<sup>37</sup> [www.redfern-gallery.com](http://www.redfern-gallery.com)

<sup>38</sup> Tom Hammick, Artist. Interview at the artist’s studio, nr Hastings, Kent.17.08.07

<sup>39</sup> Donald Hamilton – Fraser, Artist. Interview at the artist’s home, Henley-on-Thames, Oxon. 06.08.07

Liz works in a slightly different way to both Donald and Tom. She illustrates birds accurately and often to commission.

Elizabeth Butterworth and Rodolphe d'Erlanger inspecting Butterworth's set of prints *Macaws*, 1993

*I worked on commissions for 5 years flat which was fantastic but very restricting and very, very frustrating ... I was brought up with a fine art tradition of doing what I wanted...he would actually specify which birds he wanted and it was always working with in a time scale as well so it was difficult ... it was very high pressure because you wanted him to like it because you didn't want to do anything that wasn't any good ... but you knew you had to do it quite quickly.*<sup>40</sup> L.Butterworth



Working to commission can be, as Liz explained above, a frustrating way of working but to be confident that your work is already sold can be a large bonus too.

<sup>40</sup>

Liz Butterworth, Artist. Interview at the artist's home, Craziest Hill, Oxon. 06.08.07

Sheilagh Jevons also finds working to commission a challenge; '*Residencies/commissions will usually come with a brief but I don't like to compromise my own personal language so that has to dominate the work within the 'brief'*'.<sup>41</sup> S.Jevons

Donald and Tom may use the landscape or a figure as a starting point but they are not topographical artists and evolve the work to include their own narratives. All the artists I spoke to try to work in their studios everyday, not always practical but important. The ritualistic manner in which these artists approached their daily practice is almost one of a mantra; they have a routine and a sense of order which cannot be disturbed if they are to achieve a day's work. The state of mind that has to be achieved was explained in a beautiful way by Tom during his interview:



*It is a state of mind, you want to get to that bit where it is like a kind of hum...I am just emotionally involved - just under that mid point, I think the Victorians called it melancholia. I like feeling slightly melancholic, where I am a bit flat in a sense, your whole body and mind is incredibly receptive like a sponge and you get to that part in your painting where you have a relationship with the painting and you get to the point where your painting starts telling you what to do.*<sup>42</sup> T.H

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Tom Hammick

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<sup>41</sup> Sheliagh Jevons, Artist. Written correspondence from Worcestershire (responded to sent interview questions.) July 2007

<sup>42</sup> Tom Hammick, Artist. Interview at the artist's studio, nr Hastings, Kent.17.08.07

To Tom this sense of loneliness and emptiness is an integral part, allowing the piece to have space to develop and in some form was indicated in each of the interviews.

Now we can look at the actual physical process of making work. If we look beyond why our participants in this study are artists (because they are) and the minutiae of their individual actions of their studio practice, when we discussed the process it was an extremely instinctive activity. The application of paint, where to start, how to balance the page and when to know when a piece was complete was an instinctive action with an added dimension of time-learned knowledge, through education and practice and by listening.

*'It is a continual evolving process....It's pure, of that moment, now, doing it. Its wonderful, no sense of time, place, of just painting.*

*But why one's painting what one wants to bring out of one's painting when you're doing that, I think it's love, I think you are painting from the heart...<sup>43</sup>C.B*

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Carloyn Blake



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<sup>43</sup> Carolyn Blake, Artist. Interview at the artist's studio, Hereford. 14.08.07

Listening to the work is considered as an enormous part of the physical process. The main aesthetic of art would have to be in its pure form beauty; proportion, order and symmetry. This is not beauty in an historical sense as throughout time our perceptions of beauty have changed. The clean white of the Greek marble statues we admire so much were once painted in gaudy colours, when we use beauty in art it has to do with balance not fashion. All the artists spoke about the need of beauty a great deal during our discussion and also about the purpose of art:

*'My philosophy is fairly basic: to respect/honour my world and the people I meet. By making 'beautiful' paintings is the celebration of this philosophy.'*<sup>44</sup> S.J. (Examples of Sheilagh's work below)

© S.Jevons                      *'Liminality'*

*'Ultima Thule' 2002 (Most northerly spiritual place)*



*(Right) Landscape of Iona, Scotland.*

*Gaelic place name written into paint*

*Surface .Evoking 'sacredness' & pilgrimage*



<sup>44</sup> Sheilagh Jevons, Artist. Written correspondence from Worcestershire (responded to sent interview questions.) July 2007

Sheilagh also paints the landscape but is blatant in her spiritual connection and findings within the landscape. The feelings of the other artists are re-iterated by Donald:

*I suppose if you describe my painting personally, it is a poetic idiom I use. Ideology, forget it, it's about b.e.a.u.t.y. Beauty, which is a dirty word, laughable for the Young British Artists...I am awfully old fashioned, beauty, joy, when you ask what art is for it's to express the joy in the world we live in and to try and pin it down sometimes.* <sup>45</sup>DHF

What is the need of art? I put this question was put to everyone and even though we have already looked at it in broad terms when asked, all of the artists leaned the same way, the quote below from Donald sums them up better than I can.

*Everything we do should be to the benefit of a wider group of people. It's my way of helping other people with their lives. Living one's life is very hard, how should I live my life? And sometimes artists can point the way, to show meaning where people didn't see meaning or fill a space that was empty in somebody's life and they'll think 'oh yes it's not as bad as I thought'.* DHF

Ruskin said that:

*'art had a moral purpose, that people should be better for the experience for looking at a great piece of architecture or listening to a great piece for music that they are better people for having listened to it.'* <sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Donald Hamilton – Fraser, Artist. Interview at the artist's home, Henley-on-Thames, Oxon. 06.08.07

<sup>46</sup> Donald Hamilton – Fraser, Artist. Interview at the artist's home, Henley-on-Thames, Oxon. 06.08.07

The influence and information that all the artists felt was communicated by the actual art work itself was astounding. One cannot force a picture.

*It's what I was telling you; what I call accident has nothing to do with some kind of inspiration with which we have credited artists for so long. No, it's something which comes from the work itself and which suddenly appears out of the blue. In the end, painting is the result of the interaction of those accidents and the will of the artist, or if you prefer, the interaction of the conscious with the unconscious.* <sup>47</sup>

Francis Bacon

When we consider influences, or as Francis Bacon called it *inspiration*,<sup>48</sup> all the artists work from a different standpoint as they all have different interests and fascinations: Liz will find a prehistoric nugget of history in a drawer in a museum which sparks off a new wave of work as well as her devotion to different bird families and her need to capture their beauty accurately.

Tom being a narrative painter will arrive at his images from a plethora of different sources. They may be autobiographical or images, newspaper articles, films, poetry, books and other media that send an uncontrollable urge or in his words ‘ *a charge of electricity in your body*<sup>49</sup> to be understood and processed in the form of a painting.

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<sup>47</sup> Archimbaud, Michael, *Francis Bacon in Conversation*, Phaidon, London, 1993 (p87)

<sup>48</sup> Archimbaud, Michael, *Francis Bacon in Conversation*, Phaidon, London, 1993 (p81)

<sup>49</sup> Tom Hammick, Artist. Interview at the artist's studio, nr Hastings, Kent.17.08.07

Tom, like all of the interviewed artists, draws voraciously and his sketches become ‘a *diary of experiences*<sup>50</sup> which later make the basis for a painting.

*Images below by Tom Hammick © T.Hammick*



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Hutch 2005 Oil on linen



Red Carpet 2003 ed.15 woodcut

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<sup>50</sup> Tom Hammick, Artist. Interview at the artist's studio, nr Hastings, Kent.17.08.07



The more informed the person is, either through education or their own personal experiences, the deeper work will be. The ideology behind an artwork or the narrative of a piece must resonate with the viewer but our interpretation is often not that of the creator. All art can work on many different levels and even if a viewer has a different interpretation of the meaning of a work the layers concealed, physically and mentally, all add to the presence of an image. Knowledge definitely helps arm the artist, it is like food, it gives us nourishment and support, the better your art history is or the more artwork you have exposed yourself to the more 'friends' you will have to draw on.

Donald speaks about being surrounded by all the ancestral voices when he works *'they're all around you...they're all sparks, they're all looking over your shoulder. There's no such thing as total originality. Everything comes from the family as it were...They are all there.'*<sup>51</sup><sub>DHF</sub> The ideas of Rudolf Steiner, so closely observed by Joseph Beuys and other artists like Kandinsky, Mondrain and Klee, have all explored this idea: the two poles influencing one's practice and the cooperating forces.<sup>52</sup>

Carolyn finds influences in other artists, like us all, but she looks towards artists in line with her particular belief patterns rather than practical styles, Bill Viola and Antony Gormley to cite two.

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<sup>51</sup> Donald Hamilton – Fraser, Artist. Interview at the artist's home, Henley-on-Thames, Oxon. 06.08.07

<sup>52</sup> Harlan, Volker, essays. Translated by Sacks Shelley and Barton, Matthew. Beuys, Joseph What is art? Clairview, Forest Row, 2004 (pp106,100,75)

Viola has been a large influence on Carolyn's practice; Viola is a video artist and explores universal human experiences and '*the unfolding of human consciousness*' K.Perov<sup>53</sup> through film. An image from one of Bill Viola's pieces is shown here.



©KiraPerova Bill Viola.



Viola's interests in Eastern and Western spiritual practices have resonated with Carolyn. Carolyn practises Buddhism and Buddhism can work on a parallel with art, an artistic vision (the artist having given time and space) and meditation both help us to experience reality fully.<sup>54</sup>

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Painting by Carolyn Blake ©C.Blake

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<sup>53</sup> Townsend, Chris, *The Art of Bill Viola*, Thames and Hudson, London, 2004 (P47)

<sup>54</sup> Jacquelynn Baas, Mary Jane Jacob *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*. University of California Press, London, 2004 (pp191,205,215,239)

If an artwork is such a personal thing then does it need an audience? We can answer yes if the objective is to sell the work, we can answer yes if it is a piece that demands physical interaction with a piece but, even if the artist does not have these intentions, when we got to the end of each interview each artist realised in their own way that they made art as their contribution to society and as their way of trying to fulfil the basic human need to connect. If this was then to be hidden away from view then the act of making and process behind it all would be nullified.

An artist's aim should be to try to get to the truth and to see beyond. After all they are in a privileged and luxurious occupation in many ways. They have escaped the norm of the 9 to 5 and have allowed themselves the space to peer at the bigger questions. It is what Donald would call; *religion in a Wordsworthian sense* - Wordsworth saw angels on Oxford Street:

*'Behind the world we live in is another world of glory which occasionally....you suddenly glimpse a world that lies behind the normal prosaic world we live in'*<sup>55</sup>DHF

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<sup>55</sup> Donald Hamilton – Fraser, Artist. Interview at the artist's home, Henley-on-Thames, Oxon. 06.08.07

All the artists interviewed wanted to be understood, to be seen as empathisers with the human condition, to make beautiful work that would find a voice in the minds of others, that would help people and nourish their own spirits.

I would like to finish talking about the artists with a happy piece of imagery from Carolyn.

*I'd like to be able to carry on, to be healthy and well enough to just carry on and still have a joy and freshness and a need to get up and put on a blue dress and paint with red paint.<sup>56</sup> C.Blake*

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<sup>56</sup> Carolyn Blake, Artist. Interview at the artist's studio, Hereford. 14.08.07

# Conclusion

## Conclusion

How does all this affect artists today? We have investigated the influences, practical and mental, and, how each artists draws on different information. The choices are boundless; the avenues to take are endless, the inspiration limitless; in the end it has to be a quiet place of contemplation, being at one with yourself which can help you to find your own voice in such an open ended industry.

I found this enquiry not only stimulating but it also resolved my own questionings. The overall outcome of the joy of sharing artwork and ultimately our own lives was a startling and reassuring discovery for me. Over the course of writing, the dissertation did take on a different voice. I had predicted that the piece would examine each artist's views and practice more intimately. The nature of the responses given by the interviewees led to a more universal answer – an inner voice which became common to all.

The process of interviewing on film, transcribing and writing up my findings was an enriching experience and hopefully one I can pursue in further depth in the future. The artists I chose to interview all used traditional rather than contemporary art forms. Whether one is an

installation artist, a sound artist, or a painter the ultimate goal is the same. Every artist, whatever their particular agenda/issue is driven by the need to communicate with others. The ultimate answer to the question of what informs the practice of a professional working artist has to be: the need to connect. Despite all the logistics of selling and promoting your artwork and all the changes in our society which direct these processes and the different sources that each artist utilises, the artist produces the work in the hope of finding a connection.

A connection with our ancestral voices, a connection with universal forces, a connection with a complete stranger, a peer, a child, a patient, a client, any human being. A connection with anyone or anything that you deem as important in your own sphere. For one's work to resonate with another human being has to be the ultimate compliment and for many of the artists a conscious goal. Making a connection with another human crystallises your own worth.

It is more than just ego. It is developing a deeper understanding of oneself, the world, the universe, time and space.

As an artist one can only hope to somehow help others to see through the cracks through which you yourself have peered to a light source that comes from somewhere beyond our understanding.

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