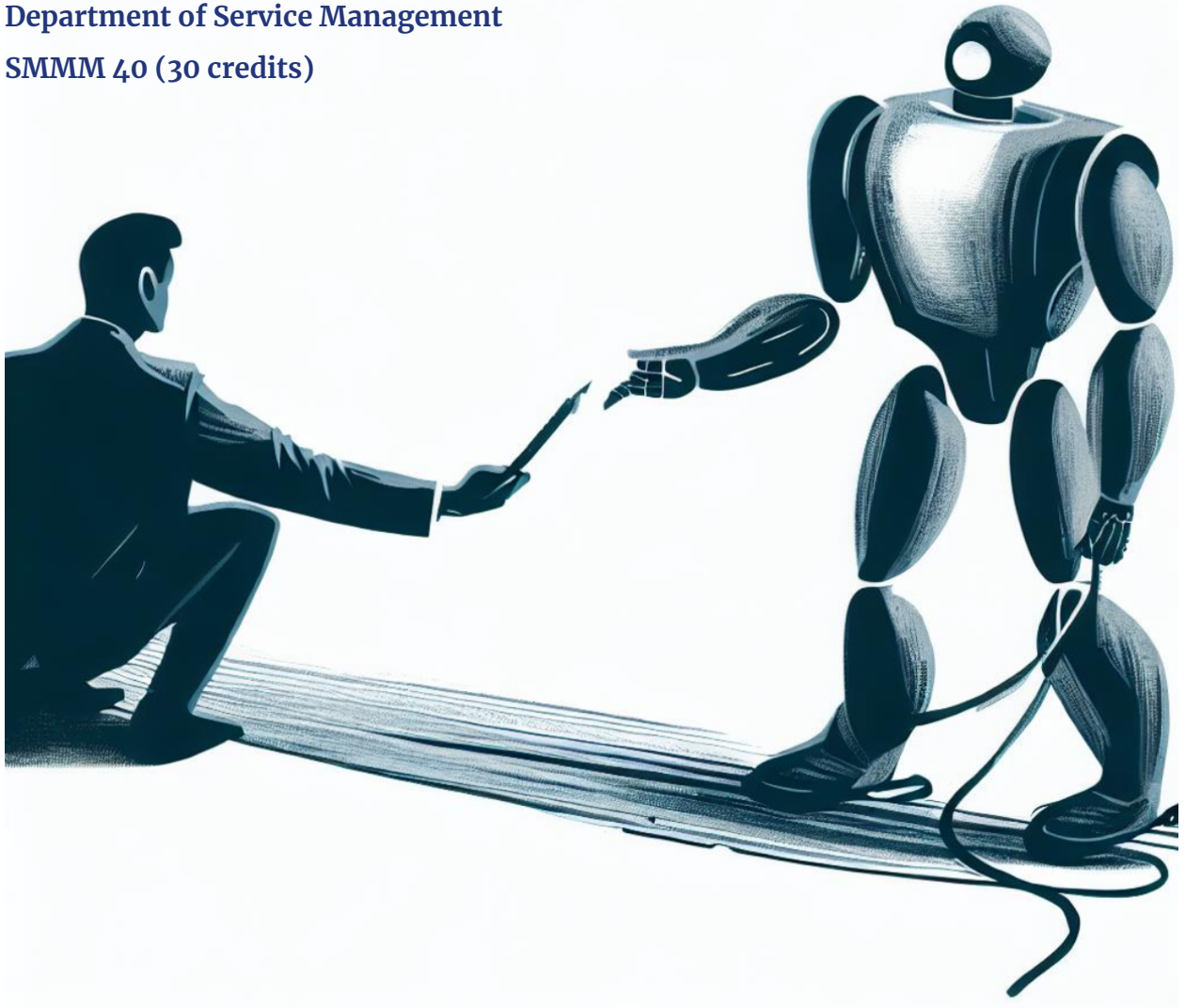




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Pushing Boundaries? Artists' worldview in the AI era from a relational work perspective

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Abstract

The thesis discusses how visual artists negotiate the boundaries between their own creative work and AI-aided work, how they establish boundaries with other artists who use AI, and How the relationship between visual artists and clients is mediated in the market with the rising popularity of AI tools. The study found that most artists negotiate meanings to take a stance and, more often than not, are open to using AI if it becomes more ethical and transparent. The study also found a stigma associated with using AI in artistic practices and that artists' collective expressions in the online environment tend to have a form of harsher criticism than individual expressions. Moreover, visual artists face precarity from budget, price, and efficiency in the economic sphere, but they generally express confidence in their social sphere. The study contributes to the literature on artists' relational work by highlighting the importance of the relational aspect and the dynamic in the tension between passion and commodity, moral gatekeeper and early adopter, and confidence and precarity.

Keywords: relational work, generative AI, Image generator, visual artists, moral gatekeeper, precarity, passion, creative industries, creative class, artwork, creative worker

***“Technology changes the way we make art,
but it does not change why we make it.”***

- Joel Meyerowitz (Photographer)”

The cover image was made by Microsoft Designer with generative AI technology. Tens of text prompts were tried for a couple of hours to have the desired outcome. We realized that the artist's intention is critical in the “creative” process. The typed description was “An artist with a brush is drawing a line on the ground, and a robot is on the other side (or against a robot), in illustration.” Although we did not order the artist to hand over his brush to a robot, we thought the action could imply cooperation with AI and selected the image as a final one.

*Alina Dumea and Heejae Jun contributed equally to the thesis as the first co-authors.

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*Love,
Alina and Heejae*

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1. Introduction

In September 2022, an AI-generated piece entitled “Théâtre D’opéra Spatial” won an art prize in the Colorado State Fair’s annual art competition. The artwork’s creator, Jason M. Allen, submitted his work under “Jason M. Allen via Midjourney¹,” stating its origins clearly. To the artists who accused him of cheating, he responded, “I am not going to apologize for it. I won, and I did not break any rules. Art is dead, dude. It is over. AI won. Humans lost.” (Roose, 2022). This event sparked the controversy that algorithms of AI image generators could beat human creativity. It highlighted that AI image generators can now produce art comparable to human-made art. Also, it raises questions about how visual artists define themselves, other artists, and creative work and how their working conditions have been and will be changed by the emergence of AI image generators. Our personal working experiences as graphic designer/illustrator and human resource manager have prompted this research.

The primary focus of our study is visual artists, including graphic designers, fine artists, illustrators, animators, and 3D/CG artists, with various levels of experience, skill, and socio-economic background. Visual artists are among the most creative positions in general companies and various industries. Also, the art and design industries have the highest number of freelancers compared to other industries. Freelance 'creatives' are at the forefront of the brave new world of work (Beck, 2000), where modern technology threatens working stability. Even amateurs can create complex and photorealistic works with the help of text-to-image software like DALL-E 2, Midjourney, and AI Designer by Microsoft. For this research, the term ‘AI’ will refer to AI image generators, text-to-image software, or AI-powered automatic colorization. This research is important because we can look into the future working environment of AI-aided creativity with the case of visual artists at the forefront of creative industries. Moreover, we might be able to transfer findings and implications from creative workers to more general workers under the wide use of AI across industries.

¹ Midjourney is an artificial intelligence program, which generates images from natural language descriptions.

Previous studies have described artists as either entrepreneurs or creative labor. With the popularity of the ‘creative class’ (Florida, 2002), policymakers regarded artists as entrepreneurs with capital who have the skills, knowledge, and creative ideas to make political and economic benefits through their artworks. Artists were encouraged to reconstitute their entrepreneurial subjectivity under neoliberalism (Scharff, 2016; Reckwitz, 2017). On the other hand, although visual artists have actively reconstructed the tasks, meanings, and value of visual artwork, many art organizations view artists as creative labor, separated from base concerns (Gerber & Childress, 2017). Studies showed that art organizations could provide an insecure work contract to artists based on their passion, leading to their exploitation (Arvidsson, Malossi, & Naro, 2010; McIntyre, 2014). As a result, visual artists often hold multiple jobs, endure precarity (Thorsby, 1994), and sometimes even decide to quit the arts. How do visual artists recognize themselves between entrepreneurs and creative labor? Do they still have creative capital as an entrepreneur? Do they have competitive advantages as creative labor compared to AI? Are they choosing to be the intentional power that can mold the AI and collaborate work for better results, or are artists pushed by the current developments of AI generative visual tools and today’s use in society?

What is less clear is the current working conditions of visual artists after the emergence of AI image generators. Many are speculating that in the AI world, visual artists will lose their status (Kuuskoski, J., 2021; Cetinic et al., 2022; Lee, 2022), and that they may face the danger of replacement, while others believe that these new technologies represent a standard progress as part of the fourth industrial revolution that will just push creativity further, reframe art and creative endeavors as we know them and artists will be as essential as ever. (Limin, 2019; Li, X., & Lin, B.H., 2021; Manovich, L. 2022; Jain & Ranjan, 2020). Digital technologies seem to be disrupting the traditional employment relationship. As digitalization continues to advance, the very concept of employment is being deconstructed, and the category of "worker" is being reformulated (Valenduc, 2019). The increasing use of AI amplifies the adverse effects of automation on labor, leading to employment polarization, stagnant wage growth, and growing inequality (Tyson & Zysman, 2022). Huang and Rust (2018) suggest that AI job replacement occurs primarily at the task level rather than the job level, starting with tasks that require lower intelligence and are more accessible for AI to perform. However, it is doubtful that AI can replace artists entirely without a significant shift in the current art paradigm (Limin, 2019; Hertzmann, 2020). While we have become

accustomed to the aesthetic that AI can create, this alone does not impress us, as there is often a lack of intention and more profound meaning behind it (Manovich, 2022), as well as a lack of social context that kindled such art (Limin, 2019; Verganti et al., 2020). Nevertheless, there is a possibility that what AI produces could be considered art if the definition of art changes (Limin, 2019) and AI tools manage to reach higher levels of creative production at the standards that humans are capable of, as seen by Borden (2004) from least to most complex: combinational, exploratory and transformational, the last being yet to be achieved by machines. Moreover, there are those such as Latour (1994) who challenge well-established ideas, such as the distinction between human and nonhumans and how we study society and proposes a different perspective that includes nonhumans, technologies, or artifacts as participants and contributors to society in a dynamic negotiation process and continuous exchange of properties.

We adopt the relational work perspective as a theoretical framework for this study, defined by Zelizer (2012) as the process by which individuals differentiate meaningful social relations in their economic activity. Relational work includes social ties, economic transactions, media for those transactions, and negotiated meanings. People constantly manage "connected lives (Zelizer, 2010)", shaping the boundaries between economic and social spheres. For example, artists frequently blur the boundaries between play and work in their creations, and intimate relationships, such as friendships, can motivate collaborative artwork. Relational work is an effective strategy for working opportunities in project-based environments in creative industries, and artists use it to attenuate labor commodification and precarity (Alacovska, Bucher, & Fieseler, 2022). Relational work could also represent a way for artists to shift from creative labor to entrepreneurship in the creative industries. It is an excellent lens to analyze the life of visual artists as entrepreneurs and creative labor. Although recent studies have acknowledged that managing social relations is an integral part of work in the creative industries (Alacovska, 2018), little is known about how much AI affects the relational work of visual artists.

We will use semi-structured interviews to study how visual artists experience and negotiate their identity, creative work, and working conditions. Some will see opportunities to achieve consumer satisfaction through co-creation with AI and demonstrate new arts-entrepreneurship adapting technology. However, others may feel overwhelmed by the

decreased number of jobs and challenges in up-skilling. Interview data can illuminate how visual artists respond to such challenges and how they shape their subjectivities. In netnography, we will observe how visual artists share their ideas and discuss AI image generators on the internet community. There could be collective forms of action by artists, and the precariat can represent their interests and become a "class-for-itself (Standing, 2011, as cited in Bain and McLean, 2013)." Visual artists may overcome the creative class discourse, which neglects grassroots struggles to protect collective arts. With document analysis on AI-themed comics, we can understand how visual artists recognize their status and what they want to deliver to readers. Comics have been a creative medium for social and political messages for centuries (The National WWII Museum, n.d.).

1.2. Aim and Research Questions

With this study, we intend to explore the complex interplay between creativity, technology, and working conditions in the visual art scene and examine how visual artists cope with precarity and reinforce their arts entrepreneurship in the face of digital innovation. More specifically, this research will investigate how visual artists establish boundaries between their social and economic spheres and if those boundaries are being pushed back in the relationship with AI.

The following research questions have been formulated:

RQ1: How do visual artists negotiate boundaries between their own creative work and AI-aided work?

RQ2: How do visual artists establish boundaries with other artists who use AI?

RQ3: How is the relationship between visual artists and clients mediated in the market with the rising popularity of AI tools?

1.3. Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured into six chapters. After the introduction, the second chapter will provide a comprehensive review of the existing literature in the field of study. This chapter presents an overview of the creative economy and creative workers, precarity and art

entrepreneurship, and visual artists in the age of AI. Following the literature review, the third chapter will present the theoretical framework for data analysis. Relational work will be used as the foundation for analyzing the data concerning visual artists' inner and outer boundaries and their working conditions with AI. The fourth chapter will present and discuss the research methodology and methods employed in the study will be presented and discussed. The fifth chapter will present and analyze the empirical data gathered through semi-structured interviews, netnography, and document analysis. Finally, in the sixth and concluding chapter, the research questions will be answered, and the contributions and limitations of the study will be discussed. This chapter will also provide suggestions for future research in this area.

2. Literature review

Considering how vast of a domain the culture and creative industries are, we have looked in our literature review at general studies concerning creative workers or more specific ones targeting one or more distinct areas. Therefore, we tried to inspect what others had researched and written about it and identify existing gaps in the literature that this present study would try to problematize and explore.

2.1. Creative economy and creative workers

Throughout history, the perception of creative workers has varied greatly based on their socioeconomic context. In order to fully grasp the roles and identities of these workers, it is essential to examine the chronological situations in which they existed. Specifically, it can highlight the differences between industrial workers of the 19th century and creative workers of the 21st century. Scholars in creative industries, such as Kong (2014), clearly distinguish between the terms ‘culture industry’ and ‘creative industries.’ The culture industry centers on mass-produced commodities, whereas creative industries integrate creativity into economic and social policies. By drawing a link between the culture industry and 19th-century industrial workers and between creative industries and 21st-century creative workers, we can better understand the changing landscape of work and production.

Adorno & Horkheimer's (1944) argument that the culture industry reproduces identical goods to satisfy the needs of millions of people, sacrificing individuality and creativity in the process (p.121), is a pertinent example of how creative workers were perceived during the 19th-century industrial revolution. During this time, creative workers such as textile designers, graphic designers, and architects were needed to design and create products for mass production. However, their work was often viewed as less important than factory workers, and was not always paid as much as other skilled workers. This economic principle and Fordism invaded the creative fields, introducing a distinction between the subject and the procedure. The invasion meant that the old skills learned by apprentices on the job and the

communities of labor built around those skills were no longer required (Morgan & Nelligan, 2018, p.2). Under 19th-century industrial capitalism, artists became practitioners of ‘artistic labor,’ far from previous aesthetics of genius. The cultural meaning of art production was fundamentally reconfigured, and artistic creation was normalized as artistic labor. The artist became a worker of this material, becoming, in a sense, the mere medium by which it is organized (Reckwitz, 2017, p.107). The artists as a medium fundamentally affected the boundary between artistic and technological industrial production. However, Adorno & Horkheimer (1944)'s view sounds fair but anachronistic today because they assumed a small number of content providers. Their examples of big production companies are still powerful in this era, but not the same as in the digital era, where millions of independent creators exist. In the digital era, we can see more diversified consumer tastes and various types of co-creation. Nevertheless, the codified creative process and artistic labor are the foundation of AI image generators, and artists may lose their status. As Adorno & Horkheimer argued long before the rise of AI, now AI might sacrifice talent, individuality, and creativity in the process by generating standardized cultural commodities. Visual artists in this era might mirror the 21st-century Luddites, following English textile workers in the 19th century who formed a radical faction that destroyed textile machinery against industrialization, automation, computerization, or new technologies.

On the other hand, the creative industries are seen as an urban regeneration strategy, with creativity more purposefully integrated into economic and social policies. It was led by a political shift from the government, broadening the scope of cultural industries, including entertainment and leisure businesses, and allowing room for a new creative industries agenda. Richard Florida (2014) introduced the ‘creative class’ and argued that the fate of cities and nations depends on the presence of creative workers. He optimistically argues that creative workers create ‘new ideas, new technology, and new creative content’ and ‘engage in the complex problem-solving practice (p. 8)’, far from the industrial workers in the 19th century. Creativity is seen as a key to fast-track modernization (Morgan & Nelligan, 2018) and as a necessary step in the passage from a low-labor cost-manufacturing center to a new economy (Ross, 2009, ch. 2). However, his theory is criticized by following reasons (Kong, 2014):

- (i) the difficulties in defining and scoping the creative industries;
- (ii) the challenges in measuring the economic benefits creative industries bring;

- (iii) the risk that creative industries neglect genuine creativity/ culture;
- (iv) the utopianization of “creative labor”;
- (v) the risk of valorizing and promoting external expertise over local small- and medium-scale enterprises in the building of “creative industries”;
- (vi) the danger of overblown expectations for creative industries to serve innovation and the economy, as well as culture and social equity; and
- (vii) the fallacy that “creative cities” can be designed.

Nevertheless, it is widely accepted that policymakers and creatives themselves view the creative industries, the creative class, and culture as the driving force behind economic growth, with cities serving as both the condition of development and its beneficiary (Hessler & Zimmermann, 2008, p.12). Economic and social policies have intensified the commodification of artistic and creative activities and empowered artists who own their ideas and creativity. This change in perspective towards artists can be seen as a modernized view and a reinstatement of their status compared to the 19th century. Despite the widespread use of AI, artists will still occupy a superior position in the creative process, thanks to their unique traits. In the AI world, artists will strive to identify their distinctive roles and value-adding activities in the face of the labor-intensive AI that produces art. However, artists are still in a position where they fight the intensified commodification of artistic and creative activities, regardless of centuries.

The roles and identities of creative workers are constantly evolving and remain a core part of the culture and creative industries. While we have compared 19th-century industrial workers and 21st-century creative workers, the emergence of AI has introduced new characteristics that creatives must adapt to. When viewed as laborers, creatives are evaluated based on their economic efficiency. However, they can maintain a distinguished status from AI when viewed as entrepreneurs with skills, knowledge, and creativity. Creatives can focus more on important tasks by outsourcing less impactful tasks to AI. While we reviewed the external perspective towards artists in the socio-economic context, our thesis focuses on artists' internal perspectives and how they perceive themselves and their relationship in the presence of AI. The following review will shift to the literature on precarity and art entrepreneurship while maintaining the contrast between 19th-century industrial workers and 21st-century creative workers.

2.2. Precarity and art entrepreneurship

Both creative labor and arts entrepreneurship have a project-based environment as prerequisite working conditions. The discussion on precarity is usually associated more with creative labor, while arts entrepreneurship tends to come up more often in connection to the empowered creative class. However, precarity and art entrepreneurship are two sides of a coin. Going further, it seems like they reinforce each other. Precarity in creative labor encourages artists to have arts entrepreneurship with empowerment, whereas art entrepreneurs feel precarity from individualized and internalized risk under neoliberalism.

Standing (2011) defines "precariat" as a term that describes workers who experience existential uncertainty and instability. This condition is especially prevalent among women and people of color, as shown by the struggles faced by women in the UK film and television industries as they try to balance their careers with parenting responsibilities (Leung, Gill, & Randle, 2015). Furthermore, the values of media work, such as informality and flexibility, make it difficult for women to advance (Gill, 2002).

The fashion industry has detached its identity from monetary value, leading to a shift where workers' value is increasingly determined by their lifestyle and identity in the reputation-based system (Arvidsson, Malossi, & Naro, 2010). This shift is driven by 'the commodification of passion' (McIntyre, 2014), which has become a means of production. Workers are 'passionately attached' to a cultural imagination that promises fascination and satisfaction (Reckwitz, 2017, chapter 1.4). Passion and creativity are promoted as essential attributes for workers, who are expected to work hard and as a form of self-care (DePalma, 2021). As a result, creative workers internalize the neoliberal economic system as a part of themselves. Which leads to more precarious working conditions as their identity and monetary value are more closely tied.

To cope with precarious artistic livelihoods, artists turn to heterodox economic practices (Alacovska & Bille, 2021) and perform relational work to attenuate labor commodification and precarity (Alacovska, Bucher, & Fieseler, 2022). Relational work involves establishing, negotiating, and terminating interpersonal relationships through economic transactions, such as gift-giving and bartering (Zelizer, 2012). However, this type of work can be emotionally

burdensome and result in underpayment (Alacovska, Bucher, & Fieseler, 2022). The more socially and spatially intimate the relationship, the less economic benefit it provides (Alacovska, 2018). Creative workers connect through networks for more working opportunities, but the informal creative labor practice of contingent, insecure, and underpaid work prevents sustainable working conditions. Nevertheless, workers maintain hope, viewed as an attitude that enables them to endure the present rather than envision utopian futures (Alacovska, 2019).

On the other hand, art entrepreneurship emphasizes artists and entrepreneurs in common, which is far from a labor class. Lindqvist (2011) highlights their similarities and importance in improving the economy, their prevalence for non-conformity, their visionary nature, and their talent for driving innovation. However, market forces imposed on the production of art and design make artists more susceptible to market conditions and competition (Ekström, 2020). Albisson's study (2008) indicates the artist's inability to see themselves as entrepreneurs due to lack of entrepreneurial skills, and Kutim et al. (2011) emphasize the lack of entrepreneurial training and outdated syllabuses in creative enterprises. Therefore, training artists to gain entrepreneurial skills is important to equip them for success in their professional endeavors (Albisson, 2008).

The present neoliberalist discourse instills in artists and other creative professionals an acute sense of self-reliance and self-criticism, fully taking the blame for their failures (Scharff, 2016, pp. 108-109; Lange, 2017, p.114). All these play too well in the aesthetic economy where the trading is made in products with sensuous characteristics and affect that cannot be clearly distinguished from their creator and the creator's self-conduct (Reckwitz, 2017, p.176). It is also mirrored in public, each drawing inspiration and aspiring to become unique, innovative, and creative and being molded by the main imperatives of self-conduct that Reckwitz (2017) observes: "the transformation of everyday perception; the development of everyday creative techniques for all, extending the ideal of the artist to make it universally inclusive; and the fixation on creativity as a social strategy in the competition for attention."

Although the domain of entrepreneurship is heterogeneous, encompassing many fields and subfields (Carlsson et al., 2014), the common view is that the entrepreneur is perceived as an individual who evolved into the perspective of the enterprise (Carlsson et al., 2014, p.917)

through the willingness to innovate what already exists and to disrupt through “creative destruction” (Schumpeter, 1942, p.83). However, as far as arts entrepreneurship goes, as Thom M. (2016) highlights, networking is one of the seven crucial entrepreneurial skills for artists. This skill would enable an artist to create relationships with different social actors that could help complete goals, get more potential clients, and increase status, popularity, and trust. For this reason, a large part of the entrepreneur's goal could be assumed to be that of thriving in an uncertain environment and being a bringer of change and constant improvement in society.

2.3. Visual artists in the age of AI

Today, professionals in the creative industries are facing challenges growing in complexity at an alarming rate. With new emergent AI technology tools that are not yet there but that seem to have the qualities necessary to replace people working in the creative industries potentially, could entrepreneurship skills and all the characteristics that it encompasses be a prerequisite for artists and people in the creative industries to remaining relevant by continuous reinvention and resilience in the face of uncertainty? In the present case, that would mean keeping up with emerging technologies, learning to use and even collaborate with AI tools as well as instructing AI to take care of basic tasks, and reserving more of their time for complex tasks, decision-making, and meaningful challenges (Ankur et al., 2020; Verganti et al., 2020). The possibility of not only co-existing with the AI as opposition or replacement, but even of collaboration or co-creation with AI (Limin, 2019; Olszewska, 2020; Lee, 2022; Chong, 2022) is something that has been hinted at for some time. A good example is Latour (1994), who advanced his ideas about how social studies should not exclude nonhumans since technology is an inseparable part of society and humans and nonhumans have been caught in a continuous process of negotiation and exchange of properties. Another example is how society or the public perceives art created by an AI or in collaboration with an AI. Studies based on the controversial Turing test (1950), which examines whether humans can make the distinction between human intelligence or creativity and that of a machine, illustrates that people are most times still able to tell the difference between man-made and machine-made artworks and tend to rate the human-made higher (Hong & Curran, 2019). Moreover, research suggests that humans tend to be negative toward AI-made art (Ragot,

Martin & Cojean, 2020). Despite the development of image-generative AI tools that get better fast with each new edition released, humans are still a step ahead when it comes to the creative outcome, at least as it is commonly understood and accepted under the present paradigm as having the prerequisites of newness, surprise, and value (Boden, 2004) and which other authors align with (Wojciechowski & Korjonen-Kuusipuro, 2021).

While some authors believe artists are still irreplaceable (Limin, 2019), others are skeptical whether this will also be true. It is a valid question seeing how many believe that adopting AI is mainly driven by capitalist motivations (Wilson & Daugherty, 2018; Wojciechowski & Korjonen-Kuusipuro, 2021).

According to Kuuskoski (2021), the artist's identity is on the verge of the fourth paradigm - from artisan, bohemian to professional, and onto something new (Limin, 2009). In this unstable environment, the artist is more inclined to nurture a “killer instinct over a collaborative spirit.” The democratization of art and the belief that everyone can be an artist in his way has led to an oversupply of artworks to their demand, a decrease in the value of art products in people’s perception. When consumers choose a small number of artists, the artists rocket to stardom. Stardom is the result of mass media, which easily enables the copy and distribution of artworks to audiences. This phenomenon is more prevalent in the digital world, and AI image generators can be our new stars in the visual art scene. Others who do not have the opportunity to exhibit their artworks might repeat the history of previous unnamed artists. When AI swallows the visual art scene and human artists cannot see hope, they might consider quitting the arts.

To shortly summarize this chapter, it is easier to understand today’s developments and fast adoption of AI tools for commercial purposes when looking at how artistic creation and artists have been molded throughout time into cultural and creative industries, respective creative labor, as a way to fit in the overlapped area of the social and the economic. The change also shows that the artists’ role is constantly dynamic and repurposing depending on the development of society, economy, technology, and much more.

The literature shows how we got here. It is essential to understand how and why there exists a trend for artists to be pushed towards gaining entrepreneurial skills in an increasingly commodified society where impositions are made on the self. Maybe it is going too far to call

out that the artist has been transformed into a wheel in the machine, but the signs are there. However, although previous studies show the high precarity artists are exposed to and acknowledge that AI might act as an additional stressor, we could not find an in-depth explanation from the visual artists' point of view on how they perceive the changed relationships in this AI era, be they with peers, clients, the public, and close acquaintances from the perspective of relational work. Moreover, there is a lack of insights into how artists establish new boundaries, dissolve old ones, or push them around and create new meanings to make sense of their place in a world close to a new paradigm shift.

3. Theoretical framework

An overview of the theories used in the present study will be given in the following sections. In order to answer the formulated research questions, relational work theory will be presented. The theory will help us understand how artists establish boundaries with their work and other artists and negotiate their working conditions concerning AI.

3.1. Relational work

Although social relations are not new in economic sociology, Zelizer made a difference by conceptualizing relational work. Unlike new economic sociologists who asserted the “embeddedness” of economic phenomena in social processes, Zelizer shifted social processes and relations from context to the center of economic activity (2023) with evidence from “real” economic activities. Relational work could explain how people negotiate the intersections between intimate and economic relations from an insider's perspective. “Connected lives” are shared spheres made by “the variable connections between different kinds of intimate relations and various kinds of economic activities (Zelizer, 2010, p.169).” Therefore, connected lives can be understood as the outcome of relational work, as “a process of differentiating meaningful social relations (Zelizer, 2012)” for “good matches (2006)”. Her relational package identified four elements of relational work: (a) distinctive interpersonal ties, (b) economic transactions, (c) media, and (d) negotiated meanings. Zelizer (2012) defined each element like below:

1. **distinctive social ties**: connections among individuals or groups involved in the economic activity;
2. **a set of economic transactions**: interactions and social practices conveying goods and services (e.g., compensation, gift, loan, bribe, theft);
3. **media for those transactions**: representations of rights to goods and services, often in the form of concrete tokens, ranging from state-issued legal tender or electronic monies to more

restricted forms such as credits in babysitting pools, casino chips, or food stamps. Media can also include time, in-kind goods, or favors;

4. **negotiated meanings**: participants' understandings concerning the meanings of relations, transactions, and media, including their moral valuation, combined with constant negotiation, modification, and contestation of those meanings.

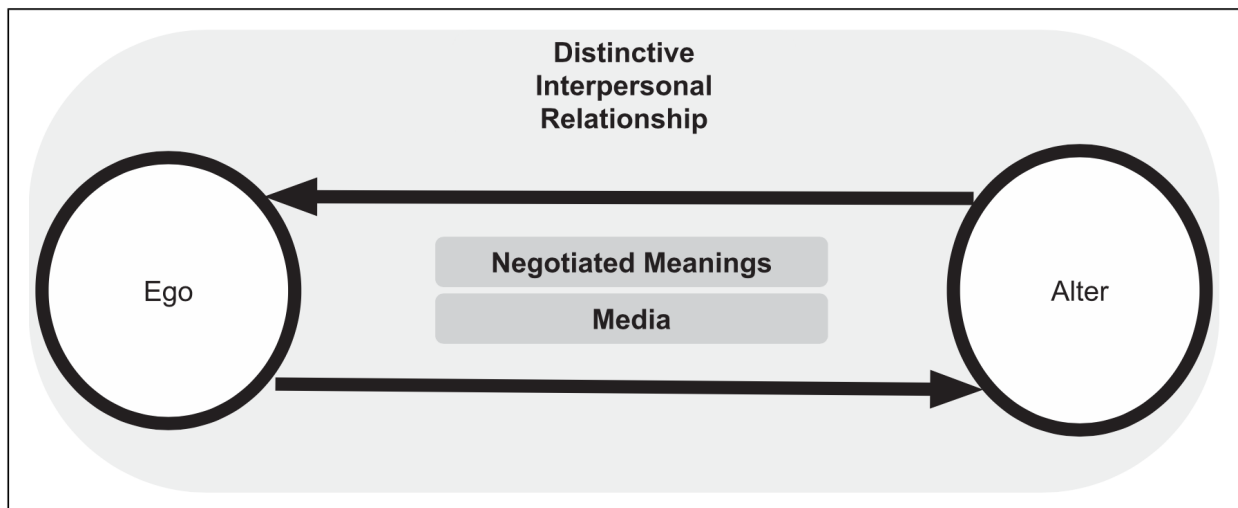


Figure 1. Relational Package (Stoltz, D. S. (1), & Pitluck, A. Z. (2), 2021)

As we can see in Figure 1, ego and alter make economic transactions based on negotiated meanings and via media in the distinctive interpersonal relationship. The quality, intensity, meaning, and consequences of relational ties among economic actors vary (Zelizer, 2023), depending on social relations and culture.

Zelizer (2010) captured economic structures called “circuit of commerce,” which standard thinking does not fully capture. A circuit can be recognized by the following characteristics (p.304):

- (a) distinctive social relations among specific individuals;
- (b) shared economic activities carried on by means of those social relations;
- (c) creation of common accounting systems for evaluating economic exchanges, for example, special forms of monies;
- (d) shared understandings concerning the meaning of transactions within the circuit, including their moral valuation;

(e) a boundary separating members of the circuit from non-members with some control over transactions crossing the boundary;

In the circuit of commerce, a structure combines its own economic activities, media, accounting systems, inter-personal relations, boundaries, and meanings in different social contexts.

Whereas Zelizer focused on the process and outcome of relational work, Bandelj (2020) identified determinants of relational work: social status, relational work skill, relational situation and temporality, the role of brokers and third parties, and the role of context.

1. **social status:** race, ethnicity (Lanuza, 2017; Hirschman & Garbes, 2019) and gender, social class, age, and religion (DePalma, 2020) shapes how actors interpret and negotiate the relational matching process.
2. **relational work skill:** more relationally skilled candidates can more quickly signal their compatibility with the interviewer in the job market (Rivera, 2012). Despite high relational work skills, candidates' systemic hierarchies disadvantage their positionality (Bandelj, 2012).
3. **relational situation and temporality:** meaningful time is important for relational accounting (Wherry, 2016). History and imagination about the future (Beckert, 2016) impinge on current interactions in long-term relationships (Zelizer, 2006, p.308).
4. **role of brokers and third parties:** intermediaries, brokers, and their parties shape relational work by intervening between providers and users of services in building trust or the legitimacy of the services.
5. **role of context:** relational work happens in the context of specific historical, legal, political, cultural, technological, and other dimensions. Relational practices connect with social classifications and institutions in a technological context (Fourcade & Healy, 2013).

Bandelj (2012, 2015) argued that relational work should be applied to broader market activities, including production, consumption, investment, labor market, and financial exchange. Relational work has been fruitfully applied in standard markets (Bandelj, 2020), including creative industries. Alacovska (2018) proved informal labor practices by

performing artists, actors, and musicians. The more intimate and closer the relationship, the less the economic benefit. The more spatially and socially distant the relationship, the greater the financial motivation. The problem is ‘compulsory informality’ in their workplace and the effect of social status as a determinant of relational work. In the creative industries, where informality is a standard, artists are forced to have intimate and closer relationships, which leads to less economic benefits. When we consider social status affects the formation of such relationships, the top-of-the-hierarchy group can regenerate the inequality of working opportunities. Relational work is observed across different sectors in creative industries.

In tourism, Andersson Cederholm & Åkerström (2016) found that Swedish lifestyle entrepreneurs who run small-scale horse-related enterprises constantly negotiate boundaries between work-oriented friendship and friendly work relations. Entrepreneurs sustained tension between a formal and informal economy in transactions and forms of repayments. The authors highlighted the tension between boundaries rather than boundary definition. Their focus is meaningful, especially in the technological context where the boundary definition changes fast. In the digital era, where boundaries are hard to be defined, the tension between boundaries might describe the relational work well in the current society. In the case of hunting tourism, the business operators balanced different norms and practices of recreational hunting, wildlife management, business ethics, and customer expectations (Andersson Cederholm, E., & Sjöholm, C., 2021). In the age of AI, artists can play a role as ‘moral gatekeepers’ because they navigate the nexus between moral (human creativity) and economic value spheres (AI algorithm). Visual artists might firmly exclude AI from human creativity or welcome AI for labor productivity and response to market demand. AI has to overcome moral challenges for its wide use in the visual art scene.

In music industries, economic relationships often are intimate personal relationships like other creative sectors. Musgrave, G. (2023) paid attention to ‘mismatches’ rather than good matches in relational work. Frequent mismatches in their relationship management lead to upsetting or emotionally destabilizing for musicians. It is still unknown whether relational work will be reinforced or weakened in the age of AI, but we want to figure out the current acknowledgment by visual artists. Further research is needed on its implications for artists’ mental health. More than personal relationships, creative workers enact practical ethical responsibilities and affectivities towards a range of human and non-human others, including

families, local communities and neighborhoods, colleagues, artistic scenes and their adjacent genres, and surrounding national and linguistic cultures (Alacovska, A., & Bissonnette, J., 2021). The role of creative workers was redefined at the societal level, far from being merely individualistic and crudely competitive actors. However, this approach should be reconsidered, whether it is forced altruism to creative workers. Just as creative workers were pressured by 'forced informality' in the workplace, they may have been forced to be ethical and socially responsible. If so, this approach adds burdens to the artist's mental health.

In performing arts, Montanari, F., Scapolan, A., & Gianecchini, M. (2016) artists can engage in relational work to exploit social ties' potential benefits. Artistic innovation results from an artist's continuous oscillation from a more 'closed' network of relationships (i.e., strong ties with few organizations) to a more 'open' one (i.e., weak ties with a large number of organizations). For this, the relational work deployed by an artist over time to manage their relationships with the organizations operating in the field is critical. What is not yet clear is the impact of digitalization on long-lasting relationships and their elements. Digitalization gives weight to open and weak relationships rather than closed and strong relationships. Thus, in the digital age, artistic innovation could be harder to achieve due to the losing closed and strong relationships or the successful principle for artistic innovation might be changed. For non-physical arts, this trend will be more intensified.

In visual art, art collectors, dealers, and artists create distinct relational circuits (Velthuis, 2005). The price of contemporary art is determined not by supply and demand in the standard view but by different pricing strategies and business practices. He labels these prices as honorable, superstar, and prudent. Unlike glamorous modifiers for art price, heterodox economic practices are the primary mode by which artists cope with and manage precarious artistic livelihoods (Alacovska, A., & Bille, T., 2021). Economies of visual artists show a diverse spectrum of labor practices ranging from formal paid/unpaid work to informal cash-in-hand work and non-monetized barter exchanges, to wholly non-commodified everyday practices of mutual aid and favor-swapping, as well as 'consumption work' such as thrift and self-provisioning. On digital labor platforms, they feel depersonalized and anonymized, driven by algorithms. Visual artists perform relational work by shaping meaningful client relations to attenuate labor commodification and precarity. Although visual artists perform relational work for a shift from creative labor to entrepreneur (capitalists),

relational work entails emotional burdens and overwork, including underpayment. It is doubtful that relational work attenuates labor commodification and precarity indeed.

The fashion model industry is a social universe where intimate social ties guide economic transactions (Mears, 2011, p.7). Social events to form ‘friendships’ among fashion workers are considered “part of the job” in the modeling industry (p.10). The “whole package” of a model’s being includes personality, reputation, on-the-job performance, and appearance. Thus, models with high social skills will likely be “winners” in hierarchical positions. It confirms that relational work skill is one of the determinants of relational work (Bandelj, 2020). As Bandelj (2012) marked, although one has high relational work skills, his/her social status, such as gender, race, and ethnicity, disadvantages his/her positionality. The glamorousness of the modeling industry (Mears, 2011) and the visual art market (Velthuis, 2005) look alike because various actors constantly negotiate their meaning and price in the market, and key laborers are excluded from the process and stay precarious.

Other than creative industries, recent studies have expanded relational work to various actors in broader market activities. Lindell, E., & Crevani, L. (2022) studied that relational work on social media masks power relations, especially between employers and young employees in precarious labor market positions and those with limited digital knowledge or financial means. Also, it means the invasion of private time and persona for both managers and employees. In the digital age, where offline and online are blurred, this phenomenon will be more intensified for people who use the digital world to have more working opportunities. Because the artists communicate with their visual images on social networks, they might feel the invasion of private time and persona as art entrepreneurs. On the other hand, Bandelj, N., & Gibson, C. W. (2019) investigated relational work and consumptions. Mainly, consumption has been considered inferior to production. However, consumers (a) earmark their money, (b) build trust or repair mistrust in exchanges, (c) negotiate power and inequality through consumption practices, and (d) walk the terrain of morally tinged commodification. Consumers actively share pressing concerns about inequality, social justice, ethical consumption, and political engagement. Artists’ ethics of care approach (Alacovska, A., & Bissonnette, J., 2021) might respond to the consumer’s relational work. In this case, ethics are achieved as “good matches (Zelizer, 2006)” between consumers and artists in the market. Moreover, consumer behavior will have a high potential to affect artists' decisions to use AI.

Relational work advanced theorizing in economic sociology, which generally focused on the network perspective (Bandelj, 2015). Relational work emphasizes meaningful relationships rather than economic rationality. In our current society, the negotiation between human creativity and AI and arts entrepreneurship is a fraction of the changes in society. We would like to explore the leap of the visual art scene in the age of AI. Through a relational work perspective, we would like to capture the different possible contexts in the visual art scene after the appearance of AI. Visual artists might have altered ego status or relationships with other artists and their clients. Moreover, the quality, intensity, meaning, and consequences of relational ties could be changed in the age of AI. One step forward, we wanted to expand the relational work framework for the present time and see if AI brings any changes to the theory. In this paper, we want to discover visual artist's altered ego status and interpersonal relationships in the age of AI. Although AI cannot act as an alter in the relational work package, AI can produce a brand new visual art scene, which affects visual artists to a large extent.

4. Method

The structure of this methodology chapter will be divided as follows: Research Design, Choosing the literature, Sampling and Data Collection of Empirical Data, Transcription and Data Analysis, and Ethical Considerations.

4.1. Research Design

This part of the paper outlines the methodology chosen to study the research question we are interested in. It is meant to present the logical paths and explain our steps to investigate, collect and analyze the data. Furthermore, it details the research strategy, how the sampling and interviews have been conducted, and how the data has been analyzed. We present the details to emphasize how the chosen methodology suits our research aim.

We departed from a constructivist ontological perspective and an interpretivist epistemological point of view. The reason for this approach is that it is important to us as social scientists to understand how the subjects, in our case, workers in the creative industries with an emphasis on visual artists, situate themselves and view AI tools and technologies. Therefore, constructivism is the most proper ontological perspective for studying the meanings and “social phenomena” accomplished by these social actors (Bryman, 2016; Silverman, 2013) as it is an investigation concerned with their different points of view and perspectives on the world. Moreover, by employing an interpretivist epistemology, we focus on “the subjective meaning of social action” (Bryman, 2016) or on individual and subjective meaning-making (Flick, 2018), as in how creative workers understand, perceive, interact and negotiate their position and contribution in relations with AI tools and technologies present. Accordingly, we consider the qualitative approach to be the most appropriate in meeting the aim of this research, which is that of gaining insights into the point of view and determinants of behavior of the creative workers and learning how they interpret through symbolic interactionism (Bryman, 2016; Flick, 2018) their place in their professional fields and what this entails for their well-being. In line with conducting this research qualitatively to reach a more complex and deeper understanding of the subject, we used an abductive approach to

collecting and analyzing data based loosely on the theoretical framework chosen and detailed in the theory chapter of this thesis.

4.2. Choosing the literature

The literature that has been reviewed has been for two distinct reasons: the first was to map the research field of the current topic (Bryman, 2016; Silverman, 2013) and find out whether existent references could present important aspects on the research questions of the paper to identify a gap in the literature and adjust or refocus our research questions; the second reason was to find useful concepts and theories that had the potential to aid in better answering the research questions on the precarity of work in the cultural and creative industries and also to expand the knowledge that already exists on the this topic, for the new emergent potential of precarity due to increased adoption of AI tools and technologies in the cultural and creative enterprises, and how creative workers manage and sustain relationships in order to counteract said precarity and relate to these new technologies.

Literature has been selected based on publication reputation and type of publications, prioritizing the social sciences journals, by direct search using such terms as “artificial intelligence,” “visual artists”, “creative work,” “precarity,” “art entrepreneurship,” “relational work,” “precarity and technology in the culture and creative industries,” “human-computer interaction,” and subsequently by looking at the references of the relevant already found articles with the hope of identifying other important references or repeatedly referenced literature sources. We have struggled with choosing literature references that were both recent and trustworthy due to the topic studied, which relates to very new technologies such as AI visualization tools. Furthermore, many references we found were not relevant to the social sciences field but to others, such as technology, IT, and engineering. The main sources for finding literature used were LUB Search, Google Scholar, Google search engine, and Connected Papers² to identify further references related to the most important articles we found.

We first read each article's abstract and the results and conclusions sections to evaluate its relatedness to our topic and its usefulness. The literature was sorted into large-encompassing

² Connected Papers is a visual tool to help researchers and applied scientists find academic papers relevant to their field of work.

themes: Precarity, Art entrepreneurship, Visual artists, AI, Creative economy, etc. For the articles evaluated as important for our research, we advanced with a more thorough reading and then a summarization of the main ideas and a short critical analysis of each.

4.3. Sampling and Empirical Data Collection

4.3.1. *Sampling*

We chose as the population sample to study people who work in the cultural and creative industries and then niched down on creatives whose jobs have a visual dimension. Therefore, throughout this study, we will refer to them as “visual artists,” although this is a general term meant to encompass graphic designers, illustrators, painters, etc. Visual artists were thought to be the most appropriate sample as AI's more advanced and popular tools of at the moment involve generating visual elements.

The sampling form used was purposively fixed, a priori sampling (Teddlie & Yu, 2007; Hood, 2007, as cited by Bryman, 2016) by contacting people we have met fleetingly and knew would make suitable subjects for the study. To complete the number of participants, we searched on social platforms. We used snowball sampling by asking the initial respondents to put us in contact or recommend someone working in a similar job that could be open to participating in our study.

We considered the balance of gender at first, but during the interview, we found that the specific field of visual art does matter. What interested us more, as we believed it would offer more depth to the study, was for them to have various degrees of professional experience and variation in the degree the participants interacted or used AI tools because different generations and experiences would maybe feel differently about these new technologies and would have distinct levels of closeness or distance to the phenomenon. Thus, we tried to have the variation of artistic experiences by artists rather than gender. However, there could be limitations in that most of our interviewees are female, and sometimes relational work is gendered. For example, when asked about the present, young women express that they worry more frequently about money than men do (Bandelj, Lanuza & Kim, 2021). If so, we might capture more fear of replacement and anti-non-commodification of artwork than average.

In the case of netnography, we looked at the most popular posts we could find with links to our studied topic among well-established artists based on the popularity of the person making the public social media post, but also at the number of reactions and comments.

For document analysis, we picked nine cartoons (Appendix 2), comics, and art that expressed ideas we considered an excellent fit to our research and were published by artists in well-known reputable publications with a large audience.

4.3.2. Netnography

A first step in data collection, but also a first incentive to work towards answering the research questions of this study, it was constituted by the vast amount of interactions in artists online communities such as social media groups or channels with concern to challenges and/opportunities that the new AI technology and open source tools pose or will pose in the future. Even though online ethnographic observation is somewhat covert and most times it does not involve the participation of the researcher, it raises some ethical issues (Bryman, 2016, p.450), could even be interpreted as lurking or is not always well-reflecting people's behavior, as these interactions take place in a virtual environment, in some cases it can be accepted as a starting point in studies. However, advocates (Kozinets 2002, 2010; Silverman, 2013) of this approach view it as a good naturalistic nuanced method, especially in studying communities that have both an online and offline existence (Bryman, 2016), which we firmly believe to be the case when studying visual artists, many of them having such a strong connection to the internet and digital tools as well as promoting themselves online. Therefore, we conducted a search using hashtags such as #ai, #aiartist, #aiart, on social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, Twitter, and LinkedIn) because, as theory dictates, it is preferred to look for online platforms or places where interaction and traffic are high (Kozinets, 2002). Moreover, what confirmed that we were on the correct path was the richness and number of interactions between subjects such as graphic designers and illustrators on social media platforms, in public posts, and in groups. We started by looking at artists' posts with many likes, shares, and comments and for insights into their perspectives. We encountered different types of manifestations for these social media posts, with text and sometimes pictures as manifestos against the unethical development of AI tools and warnings for people to support artists rather than use AI tools, and even videos from well-established artists analyzing these AI tools and voicing opinions about them, but in the end decided to

analyze four posts that had a high number of comments: 2 Facebook posts, one with 1600 comments and one with 86 comments, a Twitter post made by ArtStation on the subject of AI which had sparked reactions from the member artists' community and has over 2500 comments, and one Youtube video posted by a well-known animator which has over 5000 comments. However, due to the limitations of using this method, we deemed it necessary to use other methods, such as document analysis and interviews, to triangulate the methodology (Flick, 2018, p.191) to gain a deeper understanding.

4.3.3. Document analysis

As an additional data source, we also steered our attention to documents such as cartoons, comics, and art depicting instances where creative workers and AI are involved. According to Bryman (2006, p.560), documents can be considered “windows onto social and organizational realities.” Similarly, how they can reveal the “reality of an organization” and show the reality of a group with common characteristics. In the case of our research, visual documents are how artists express visual, social, and economic aspects of their lives and how their truths permeate from analyzing such artifacts. Cartoonists use symbols, caricatures, stereotypes, analogies, juxtaposition, irony, captioning, and labeling to convey their messages (The National WWII Museum, n.d.). Document analysis has been done to gain insight and analyze any underlying feelings that may be seeping from these jokes or sometimes easily overlooked visual expressions.

In choosing the cartoons, comics, and art to study as documents (Appendix 2), we followed Scott's four criteria (as cited by Bryman, 2006, p.546): authenticity - the artifacts are created by members that fit our sampling choice; credibility - they show personal and group attitudes; representativeness - they are typical ways in which artists communicate; meaning - the chosen documents have meaning that is linked to our research interest. The document analysis, the netnography constituted essential steps in formulating well informed questions, as specific as possible in the interview guide for finding insights necessary in trying to answer the research questions of this study.

4.3.4. Semi-structured Interviews

The main data-collection method was done through 11 semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted between 5th of April 2023 and 2nd of May 2023 (Appendix 5). It is considered

that this is an appropriate method for collecting rich information in alignment with qualitative studies and allowing the participants to open up and offer the researchers rich descriptions which when analyzed can offer valuable insights into the perceptions, attitudes and behaviors of the interviewees (Bryman, 2016, Flick, 2018). These interviews were conducted online using the video calling application Zoom. Interviews were audio recorded for transcription at a later date. This is considered a good solution when location and time constraints exist (Bryman, 2016). We also gave face to face options for interview candidates, but every interview ended up online due to the scheduling issues. The duration lasted on average 1 hour. The recordings were made on our laptops and phones and later transcribed. From the video interviews, we realized it was easier in the end to make observations of the participants' attitudes through tone at a later on play of the recording when the interviewer could focus only on this rather than also on conducting the interview.

We first compiled a list of possible interviewees with purposive sampling and contacted them through emails or direct messages on social media platforms. We then decided on a specific date and time for the interviews to take place. We aimed to hold most of the interviews in English so both of us could participate. In this way, we could overcome the researcher bias, when the interview was conducted by one person. However, in a few selected cases, to accommodate the interviewee, we decided it would be better for gaining more rich data, to do the interview in the respondent's native language. Subsequently one interview was held in Romanian (Interviewee 8) and 2 interviews in Korean (Interview 4 and Interview 7), and in the rest of the cases, the interviews were conducted in English. However, after all the non-English interviews, we shared the flow of the interviews and delivered the context to the other researcher. Then the interviews were transcribed and coded, the important quotes that were relevant to the research questions were selected by the researcher who speaks the same language with interviewees. The interview guide, developed with the number of interviews, was designed in three parts: the first with a few easy questions for establishing rapport and making the interviewee comfortable, the second containing questions about their creative process and AI tools, and the third with questions about working conditions. The guide was carefully created with questions that could aid in exploring the research questions, but were not strictly followed (Appendix 1). As "in qualitative interviewing, interviewers can depart significantly from the interview guide" (Bryman, 2016), when opportunity presented itself and one of the interviewees wanted to take the discussion outside the scope of the interview

guide, this was allowed as this was designed as an explorative study from which the researchers want to find out how the participants construct their worldview.

We also conducted a pilot interview in which we tested the relevance and applicability of the interview guide as one of us is by profession a graphic designer and had a similar profile to that of the people in the sample. This trial helped us reassess our interview guide and rephrase some of the questions and confirmed that we have enough variation and number of questions so as to elicit answers for the entire 1 hour duration of the interview and keep a good flow of the discussion. This was successfully achieved in all interviews with the exception of one which ran on the short side. The reason the interviewee made the interview shorter was from her indifference in AI regarding her artworks. Even though she used various technologies in her creative process, it was hard for her to express many thoughts on AI.

To establish rapport with the interviewees, we started each interview with a presentation of what is happening with the emergence of AI, and offered some details about our background that we thought the interviewees would relate with. The process of the interviews was flexible, with the interviewers alternating between the questions where possible and with ample space and leeway for the interviewees to answer and we tried to alternate the questions between the two interviewers. Moreover, we presented to them what the questions revolved around and specified that any personal data would remain confidential.

4.4. Transcription and Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed using a transcription software, Otter AI, that would take the audio file and turn it into text that afterwards we have corrected by listening to the recording. As the first four interviews were done in the period of five days, we started with these and we highlighted what we found to be the most important to the present study's research questions and made comments on all of them to help us later relate them to a certain theme. Furthermore, we coded the interviews that afterwards were grouped according to similarity. These groups lead to the formulation of eight larger encompassing themes: (1) rejection versus curiosity, (2) moral gatekeepers versus early adopters, (3) fake artist versus real artist, (4) offline network versus online network, (5) friends & family versus clients & buyers, (6) passion versus commodity, (7) working alone versus collaboration, and (8) confidence versus precarity. The researchers consolidated at a further date into just three themes: (1) "between

passion and commodity”, (2) “between moral gatekeeper and early adopter” and (3) “between confidence and precarity” (Appendix 6), and tried to formulate them as continuums, renouncing the “versus” to better reflect the complexity emerging from the data. For each of these themes the most relevant excerpts from the transcriptions were chosen to better illustrate the findings. To an extent we tried to find similarities and identify differences as well in order to gain a more comprehensive insight into the participants’ worldviews. We made the utmost effort to go into the data collection but also into the data analysis with an open mind and found insights that were beyond our expectations when starting the research (Silverman, 2013, Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). The themes we established followed the research questions: “relation to AI in their creative processes” (RQ1), “relation to peers and specifically to peers who use AI” (RQ2), “precarity and working conditions due to AI” (RQ3).

Triangulation of the data collected through the three methods mentioned above and thematic coding as well as semiotics in the case of documents analyzed, allowed us to better identify patterns and links and look for convergent or complementary findings (Flick, 2008, p.197). Moreover, it helped us follow Alevesson & Kärreman’s advice (2007a, 2012, as cited by Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018) in order “to create and solve ‘mysteries’ (...) search for breakdowns, clashes between theoretical assumptions and impressions from the empirical material.”

4.5. Ethical Considerations

We were very careful to respect the ethical considerations of research such as informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and avoidance of possible harm inflicted to the participants (Silverman, 2013, Bryman, 2016). We did not coerce anyone to participate in the research, just gave a description of the study and invited people that would fit the profile of our sampling and explicitly told them they were free at any moment to change their minds or to refuse to answer any of the questions asked in the interviews. We contacted people either via email or social media platforms with a written message that contained: a brief introduction of us, the team conducting the study, and a few words about the research subject (Appendix 4).

At the beginning of each interview we offered more detailed information about the research we were conducting and asked people for consent to hold the interview and for audio recording it. However, the transcription software, Otter AI has a policy that says: “When you use the Services, you may provide us with your audio recordings, automatic Otter Assistant screenshots and any text, images or videos that you upload or provide to us in the context of the Services”. Although provided information is merely used to improve services and not shared with third parties without consent, we admit that information from the interviews transcription is accessible to the service provider. Considering the nature of the qualitative interviews, there were moments when we felt that participants became more emotional or uncomfortable while recollecting a specific memory or example that fitted the question asked. In such cases, we reiterated our assurance that it is completely fine for them to refuse to answer any questions. However, in every case, they continued their stories. We believe that we tried our best to make the interviewees as comfortable as possible without leading them on or interrupting them. In spite of that, some of the questions are prone to unveil some feelings.

5. Analysis

“When new forms of economic activity arise, how do ordinary people integrate them into their existing webs of meaning and solidarity? How do markets and interpersonal networks shape each other? (Zelizer, 2011, p.1)” With the lens of relational work, we will analyze these questions for the artists in the age of AI. At this moment when AI is gaining influence, artists are constantly negotiating and establishing their boundaries between separate spheres. One is oriented toward sentiment and solidarity, and the other toward rational effectiveness (p.5).

5.1. Between passion and commodity: decision factors for adopting AI

Pricing creativity raised a question: how can we establish monetary equivalents for human creativity? Should we? Who decides? Velthuis (2005) investigated different pricing strategies and business practices made by art collectors, dealers, and artists in their distinct relational circuits. “Market exchange conflicts with human values that defy impersonal, rational, and economizing influence (Zelizer, 2011, p.19)”. We have gathered from the interviews that there exists a tension between the artists' motivation of creating art and their need to sustain a living from creative work, be it in their roles as freelancers or in full-time job positions. This is in alignment with the literature (McIntyre, 2014, Reckwitz, 2017) highlighting to a degree a commoditization of their passion for creating that they have to use for commercial purposes. There was a sense of negotiation that emphasizes the relational aspect and the dynamic, not with a different actor, but at the level of the self between the passionate ‘ego’ and the ‘alter’ which is reflective of the Relational Package (Stoltz, D. S. (1), & Pitluck, A. Z. (2), 2021).

5.1.1. *Commoditisation of human creativity*

A fixed dollar amount is a part of the general movement to analyze and formalize the management of creativity (Zelizer, 2011, p.21) in a utilitarian manner. Interviewee 7 describes how the price of artworks is set in the art fair. We could observe that the art fair

which is stronger in the power relation established a fixed-dollar amount for any individual artwork. Art fairs as a broker or third party shape relational work between visual artists and their buyers (Bandelj, 2020). Also, the deducted price of her artwork proved that people maintain strong distinctions in payments to define different kinds of social relations (Zelizer, 2011, p.145).

“Usually at that age [interviewee’s age], there’s a reasonable price for canvas size. There’s a price per size. I usually set the price following it and in the case of the fair that I mentioned earlier, there’s a fixed price. You can just decide on your own, but usually, we keep the line. If an acquaintance buys my piece, I deducted the price.”

An illustrative example is offered by Interviewee 6 who admits that she negotiates her art style to suit the prerequisites of her job position:

“I make solutions that are more in their favor [the company’s] than in my artistic favor. So also being with the newspaper for so long I’m used to tweaking my style a bit so it works for them.”

The same is mirrored by Interviewee 9 for her job as a graphic designer where after working for the same company for 5 years, she feels that her authentic art style has been alienated or warped to suit the job position:

“I’m very much like a commercial graphic designer. So I don’t do work in my style. I do work in my company’s style. (...) it is because sometimes your go-to style maybe doesn’t fit with the company style and you have to relearn a bit and rethink. (...) I’ve been here at this department for four or five years, so sometimes it feels like I work so much here that I don’t have any personal style anymore. I’m more like ‘what does the customer want’ and you do that. So in that way, I also mean when I say I’m a commercial designer right now more than a personal one (...) So more designer than artist. If you can say that.”

Despite this molding of the self for commercial purposes, the interviewed artists in such a position, try to compromise and focus on the aspects that they like about their jobs and which appease their creative self, sometimes almost romanticizing their day-to-day activities or seeing it as a means or condition they have to meet to allow the true self artistic persona to be

expressed. The myth is that economic activity corrupts intimate relations, but the fact is that people constantly mingle intimacy and economic activity without corruption (Zelizer, 2011, p.171). As Interviewee 6 explains, working as a commercial graphic designer or illustrator, she needs to be able to explain her processes and choices for generating a suitable solution to one of the company's problems. She sees it as a necessary compromise:

"I think I get hired on the art for the art, but I actually do the other things 90% of the time and 10% I do this 'just go with the flow'. Actually, what makes the money... If I could live off this as the 90% without the other one, who is going to pay me just to be like "art stuff", but it's a process that helps the other side too."

Interviewee 11 conveys the same point but adds the dimension of preserving artistic energy for the artistic persona, as a separate entity from the one doing the day-to-day job.

"At my job, we work with brands, and they have their own branding and their stylistic choices. I follow quite a lot of branding. So my creativity, yeah, I can apply it here and there. But it's that I don't have that much freedom as my artistic persona, of course. But it's something that I like. It gives me like a sense of direction because here I just follow the branding and the rules. And I can do my own stuff for my artistic persona."

It can be said that there is a difference between art that comes purely from feelings and emotions and true artistic expression and creative products for economic purposes. Therefore, a sense of attachment to one's art could be observed:

Interviewee 1: "You create it because you love it and you have to like feel like you have to not because it gives you money. It's nice if you have money, but you will still be creating anyway, even without the financial. I was drawing art on the walls when I was a child so money was really not important. (...) My passion for art makes me make art. I mean, there were so many times when I've been offered money for art pieces that I really did not want to make, and I just didn't. I was like 'No', 'But I'm offering you money'. 'I know, but no', because when you make commissions you make them in a certain way that the client wants to and sometimes it clashes with your ideas."

Interviewer: Do you feel any pressure to give it [a gift] back in any other form?

Interviewee 7: “That’s why I felt guilty, I felt like I got to give my drawing back, but I didn’t. I held on to it. It would be sad if I gave my artwork and that’s not his/her style, he/she would put it in the storage room. So I’m careful to give my artwork as a gift. When someone even bought my work, it could be put in a corner afterward.”

Interviewee 7’s guilt for accepting gifts implies artists are in the “circuit of commerce (Zelizer, 2010)” where they sometimes swipe their artwork as a gift in economic transactions (2012). Guilt is the disturbing feeling of self-criticism resulting from our belief that we have done something immoral or wrong. Therefore, we can interpret that artists have negotiated meanings for ‘right’ and ‘moral’ economic transactions in their “circuit of commerce” (Zelizer, 2010). This tension between passion and commodity concerning one’s creative work seen through the perspective of the developments of AI tools and their adoption, is expressed as a swaying receptiveness and is a good representation of how artists negotiate meanings by their positioning according to a moral valuation (Zelizer, 2012). The voiced opinions could be resumed as a willingness to use AI if that would make one’s commercial work or job faster or easier. Interviewee 1 while for personal projects would never use AI, and enjoys the struggle of coming up with new ideas, and finding and applying new techniques in her art, when it comes to her day job, she says that *“However, if you have a job and they say do this in 10 minutes, obviously you're going to use some help to do that in 10 minutes.”* Interviewee 6 reflects in a similar way on the use of AI for the newspaper that she currently works for, where speed is more important than a perfect result:

“Well in the newspaper at some points it would make total sense to use AI. Like we produced a lot of illustrations and we didn't have a lot of time for it was produced really, really fast. And I won't say not a lot of them it's like carefully done like (...)some of them, of the works, are illustrated really fast without a lot of care for it.”

In a similar vein, Interviewee 3 speculates that many from the digital field would be enthusiastic about using AI tools as help in completing their commercial projects faster, streamlining processes, and overcoming the boring, strenuous parts that their job entails:

“Digital artists, we are constantly presented with this, with new tools that make our job faster and easier and smarter and I think a lot of us see the value in it. Like I don't think any of us would like to sit painstakingly putting in like dots on a piece of paper because that's something like... if it's a repetitive work to say like there's a lot of things in our field and it's like, okay, I just did the fun part and now I have to spend a very long time doing these very

boring, but very necessary parts. And if you can get an AI to do that for you, that's incredible, especially in the 3D field."

From the viewpoint of a new media artist who relies on AI generative tools, Interviewee 8 goes even further and makes a point out of emphasizing the vital role technology and adaptation have in today's competitive work environment for artists, where fast delivery of work can make the difference in whether one gets a project or not:

"The artist must somehow redefine his work and accept technology in his life and in the way he does his work precisely to look at it as an efficient way to deliver faster and satisfy the customer faster because, in the end, it is precisely others who use it that will take away that customer who wants it tomorrow. There is some pressure from that point of view. From my point of view, the creative process takes time and it's great that it takes time and it's something nice for us, especially those of us who like to grind there on any kind of I don't know detail. Or when you want to make something that is close to your soul? But the moment we relate strictly to business, to efficiency, to all this material side and this world in a constant hustle and bustle and movement, yes, there we have to somehow adapt to style and progress and advanced technology."

The relational situation, temporality, and role of context determine relational work (Bandelj, 2020). The artists' opinions quoted in this section are mirrored also in cartoons, where the use of AI is closely related to art as a commodity. A cartoonist working for New Yorker magazine aims to draw a "brilliant" cartoon before the deadline (Image 2). When a cartoonist sees himself as a creative 'labor', an AI image generator is an effective means to have brilliant ideas for his outcome. In Image 8, the AI tag is on the painter's vest, and he is drawing a QR code with only black ink. The painting has no color (which means personality), and the artworks all look the same in the shape of a QR code. This is reflective of Adorno & Horkheimer's (1944) fears in that the culture industry reproduces identical goods to satisfy the needs of millions of people, sacrificing individuality and creativity in the process (p.121). On the other hand, artists' passion is illustrated with sketches of the sculpture, a broken tool, a skeleton (which means their lifetime), and sometimes blooded hands in a brutal way (Image 9). This meant that the old skills learned by apprentices on the job and the communities of labor built around those skills were no longer required (Morgan & Nelligan, 2018, p.2) in the age of AI. In conclusion, Most of the cartoons regarding AI show a negative attitude toward

the commodification of creativity. Pricing creativity sets up a problem for economic analysis. "No magical calculator yields a neat ranking of human [creativity] (Zelizer, 2011, p.14)."

5.1.2. *Why artists make art affects how they perceive AI*

Another interesting finding is that there is a continuum where artists place their artworks depending on whether it comes from pure emotion or is done for commercial purposes. Even though human creativity and money were thrown together and the value of creativity became measurable by money (Zelizer, 2011, p.31), artists tend to guard their passion projects and refuse to see them as commodities. Being art for art's sake, they want it to be enjoyed by others, but not for it to represent an item that can easily be exchanged or acquired. As Interviewee 5 eloquently explains:

"Ah, I never mind mentioning I will prefer it in the exhibition, but I won't feel comfortable when it's, like becoming a product that sells to people, but I will prefer it in the exhibition. I will prefer it to showing many people but not just belonging to one person. (...) My (art) world is not that powerful. Or I won't, I don't really have more confidence in selling my work yet."

However, it can be said that indecision or confusion is characteristic of how they perceive their work and the line is not always easy for them to discern between art made by passion or for monetary gain. It is a complex issue that they are confronted in the present times when not many have the chance to make a living as an artist on their own (Alacovska, A., & Bille, T., 2021) and portrays an internal artist/vendor dichotomy that they are trying to make peace with.

On one side they reject the idea of their artwork as a commodity. Interviewee 7 explains:

"(...) artists post pictures on online platforms and buy and sell artworks. But whenever I was asked to post my artworks, I hate doing it. I think it's being consumed. It could be an opportunity to show it to a lot of people. It could be consumed without knowing whose drawing it is. It's different from looking at a painting itself and looking at an image by scrolling here and there. I didn't like it. I think I drew a lot of things, but I didn't think I needed to get any economic benefits from it, so I didn't do anything more actively. So I refused a lot of suggestions for collaborations. So I don't think I'll do it with AI."

And on the other side, as Interviewee 10, a successful artist from Denmark says, even exhibitions and all art events have a commercial dimension:

“Well, an art show is a commercial show. In the gallery, when you put up a show and have an opening it's a commercial show. So as all shows are actually.”

This is also voiced by Interviewee 4, who mentions:

“Rather than exchanging gifts or things, I'm trying to treat my talent as a commodity.”

Her way of treating artwork is a sort of personal movement against informal practices (Alacovska, 2018) in the visual art scene. A further aspect of how artists perceive the value of their work is the energy and time invested. And here it is thought-provoking to see that their openness to using AI in commercial projects reflects the idea that fast products that can be consumed or have a purpose for a limited time, hold less real value for them, but are just a necessity. Interviewee 1 views that the real value is in the sense of accomplishment that you get when you invest yourself in the process:

“(...)it's good to be in your bubble and create and feel every cell in your body creating that thing (...) and also I think it makes you more accomplished at the end.”

In addition to what has already been mentioned, there exists pressure artists feel to create a marketable persona that the public can admire or relate to. Interviewee 1 elaborates more on the subject of having an online presence and how she believes this to be a trend even among traditional already established artists:

“The people that have a social media or well-established social media, they have money-wise, they're doing good. Because they have YouTube, they have Instagram, they created a community. People liked them as people. They like them as artists, and this helps them be more financially independent. I'm not sure about the normal, traditional painters, how they're doing at the moment, I think they're doing the same but I really don't know. I follow a few traditional artists and even though they have started to grow even though they're older,(...) older artists don't have social media, they have to make it now. And they actually did start to

make their social media more abundant. And maybe it helps, maybe it doesn't, but I think they're trying to follow the trends."

Visual artists' social media is proof that visual artists engage in relational work to decrease their precarity (Alacovska, Bucher, & Fieseler, 2022) and increase financial benefit. However, relational work on social media platforms masks power relations (Lindell, E., & Crevani, L., 2022). Visual artists often communicate with their visual images on social networks, they might feel the invasion of the artist's persona.

"The task of converting human [creativity] into commodities is highly complex, creating inescapable sources of structural ambivalence in any [artist] that deals commercially with such sacred 'products' (p.32)". A "good" artwork is defined on different grounds by different socio-economic agents. "The growth of capitalism resulted in a new respect for the infinite worth of [human creativity], displacing the earlier utilitarianism with an absolute valuation of [human creativity] (Zelizer, 2011, p.31-32)". Visual artists are constantly negotiating the boundaries between passion and commodity in the getting-bigger creative economy.

5.2. Between moral gatekeeper and early adopter: contextual positions towards AI

From a relational perspective (Zelizer, 2012), visual artists showed distinctive social ties in the cultural and creative field under the effect of AI and had negotiated meanings as a moral valuation against AI. Their social status, relational situation and temporality, and role of context emphasize relational work (Bandelj, 2020) among artists.

Similar to hunting tourism business operators (Andersson Cederholm, E., & Sjöholm, C., 2021), artists can be viewed as mediators or moral gatekeepers in situated negotiations with clients and other stakeholders in cultural and creative industries, balancing different ethical, economic, and social values. Visual artists navigate the nexus between what they perceive as moral (human creativity) and economic value spheres (AI tools). Creative workers enact practical ethical responsibilities and affectivities (Alacovska, A., & Bissonnette, J., 2021) towards artists themselves, business operators, consumers, society, and moreover future

generations. Their role seems to be coming from the societal role of artists as well as individualistic and crudely competitive actors.

5.2.1 Heightened moral gatekeeping group attitude online

From the interviews, we gathered that their social class as artists shaped the ways in which actors interpret and negotiate the relational matching process. Because visual artists often prefer to work alone and scattered, their working style makes them hard to stand alone as a "class-for-itself" (Standing, 2011, as cited in Bain and McLean, 2013), regarding how they position in relation to AI tools. Nevertheless, all the interviewees admitted that online news about AI technology and tools catches their attention indifferent on whether they tried AI or have future plans to use it.

Interviewee 1: "Yes, yes. Of course, I'm interested. It's a lot of noise created around it and I have to get on it. Have to know what it is. Just like with the NFT³s when they appeared and now they disappeared or something I don't know. When the NFTs appeared, I had to know what it was. Maybe it's something that I'm interested in (...)"

Interviewee 2: "I wouldn't say I'm like, looking it up every day. I know what... sort of most people know, like, you know, put you in a prompt, you get the result that you want. Or something like that, you know, you could like I think I know like, as much as people know, I'm not really paying close attention to it because I'm not really as interested in it."

Interviewee 6: "No, but I follow a lot of like graphic pages and there's a lot of AI in the last couple of months, but they discuss it. So I've been following the discussion."

Interviewee 9: I follow a really interesting Instagram account that only does AI artwork now. So I got a bit inspired by her and really wanted to try out but I don't have a good plan.

Having this interest in common shows alignment to the netnography, where we found out that there is more of a group presence which materializes in collective forms of action by artists on social media such as posts of protest against AI, used as a means of instigation.

³ A non-fungible token (NFT) is a unique digital identifier that is recorded on a blockchain, and is used to certify ownership and authenticity. Digital art is a common use case for NFTs.

Online public postings and conversations that we observed (Appendix 3) coalesce mainly around the idea of ethical issues and manifest in the image of a protest bringing together creatives from various areas of the cultural and creative industries. The spark of this phenomenon was ignited in December 2022, when a very popular portfolio website, Artstation started to permit users to upload AI-aided and completely generated images, as well as for AI-tools to feed already uploaded artworks of the members into their machine learning databases. The reaction from the artist community was swift, strong, and unforgiving and many positioned themselves against this by posting artworks in their own style depicting a red prohibition sign (red circle crossed by a diagonal line) over the letters AI. This was followed by the emergence of hashtags such as “#noAI” and “#artbyhumans” in public online postings on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn. These hashtags have become popular and artists use them when posting updates showcasing their work to emphasize that they either reject the idea of AI-generated art and/or the unethical practices involved in the development of AI tools for image generation. Their prevalence in numbers of tens of thousands of posts including them point out the acuteness of the situation. It is also a way for them to support others from the same field, connecting under the same values, but also signaling that they align with a specific stance towards these tools. Furthermore, it emphasizes a strong tension that they feel when relating to these tools, but also to peers who may use them. Responses to posts by fellow artists supporting the movement are numerous and reflect the emotional engagement of the participants to the discussion and the unethical infringement that they believe these tools are committing. We can see how third parties (Artstation) affect relational work (Bandelj, 2020) of negotiated meaning among artists. Comments such as the following reflect well the opinion among artists:

“Just because it's ‘legal’, doesn't make it right. It is not moral for sure.”

“AI image generation technology is great but needs to be controlled and used properly for it to not destroy the art industry.”

Sacred things such as human creativity are distinguished because we will not treat them in a calculating, utilitarian manner (Zelizer, 2011, p.21). However, some artists claim their

financial reason to be a “moral” gatekeeper, which shows blurred boundaries between the social and economic sphere.

“I’m against it. Period. We’re not hired simply because we can draw. We’re hired because of our experience, our ingenuity, and our eye for excellence. Often, when we push back against clients, it can be interpreted as having an attitude, when really it’s just us trying to deliver the best product. But if clients could go and produce their own ‘genius’ without the pain-in-the-ass artist, and do it faster and cheaper... They’re not going to understand or see what could be possible with a collab. They’ll just go with cheap and easy and be satisfied with their own creative genius. So, no. I’m against it because it puts us out of business.”

At the same time, those not part of the cultural and creative industries but part of the public, accuse the moral gatekeeping of motivations of defending status and commercial value. One of the harsh comments but one that is supported by over 500 people in the form of likes emphasizes this clashing point of view:

“You do not own art, and you can’t stop AI from learning from your art, even if what it learns and does resembles what you do (till the details of your signature). You are the definition of a conservative corporation worried about private property (your so called ‘copyright’) and worried about your capitalist goals being shattered to pieces when art development goes -truly- mainstream and democratic to everyone, with or without talent, skills and knowledge - which are just tools of the rich to be richer and perpetuate class struggle.”

Although visual artists cope with and manage precarious artistic livelihoods (Alacovska, A., & Bille, T., 2021), some people regard visual artists as a rich class, who have talent, skills and knowledge from policymakers’ perspective toward creative industries. In this context, aspects such as copyright, artwork theft, unfairness, or art style appropriation are also common as part of the argument.

On the other hand, artists who use AI are blatantly overcommunicating about this and are transparent about the integration of this technology into their creative practices. This could have at least two interpretations, the first being that they want to highlight their work from a pioneer stance or early adopter, pro AI artist. The second interpretation we could envision is that in the face of accusations of more traditional or conservative artists and the gray area

concerning the ethical issues of using these tools, they make it a point to be clear about using AI tools and so highlight the idea of possible co-creation and collaboration with these AI-tools.

The exchange of opinions through public messages on social media depicts the clash of perspectives and while it creates cohesiveness and group alignment in a sense, there are more than two sides, and there is contention and division in the art world depending on the negotiated meanings (Zelizer, 2012) for what each artist stands for, on one side being art through the effort of sustained work and practice to acquire skills and create from a vantage point of passion, artistic freedom and mastery of one's profession, and on the other side that of the ones believing that art is for everyone, should be democratized, with no needs for copyrighting as now with this tools anyone can use ideas to be creative or help speed up processes for more impact with minimized efforts.

5.2.2. The role of context for early adoption or rejection of AI

The appearance of AI image generators set a meaningful time for relational accounting among artists (Wherry, 2016). The starting point of AI creation is one of the great events in the timeline of creative activities. Visual artists might feel the importance of their role, which can reinforce the moral gatekeeper attitude.

Relational work regarding AI is conducted in the context of specific historical, legal, political, cultural, technological, and other dimensions of cultural and creative industries (Bandelj, 2020). The moral gatekeeper is rooted in historical, cultural, legal, and political dimensions. Artists have made their own artwork with their hands throughout history and have valued the creative process as much as aesthetics itself culturally. They question their legal and political rights in the use of AI in creative work. On the other hand, early adopters take AI in the technological context if it gives benefits during their creative process. From the long history of art, an hour hand in the clock seems to be more tilted toward moral gatekeepers rather than early adopters, within the artists' community.

In contrast to what we gathered by means of document analysis and netnography, interviews revealed that the artists who took part in the study were not hardwired to pick a side and

would not vehemently reject the idea of using AI image generators in their artistic processes. However, some made a distinction in their acceptance of these tools based on whether the aim of the work would be considered a commodity. Under the guise of a commercial work task, the attitudes towards AI tools use were considerably milder or reserved compared to the straight rejection and accusations observed in the online communities of artists.

Most interviewees did not show a radical attitude towards the use of AI generative tools, keeping either a reserved attitude or one that exudes openness to adoption. However, artists that have more traditional methods, in spite of the fact that they read news about them, did not find an incentive to look into the details of these technology tools or to incorporate them into their processes. Interviewee 1 who holds a job as a graphic designer reveals to us that she tried different digital tools even if not yet AI as she does not find the idea to be attractive, but somehow time and again returned to traditional methods and prefers to do watercolor and traditional illustration and painting in her spare time:

“I think art comes from expressing yourself or expressing something and the robot can't express anything if it's a robot.(...) You have to know what's going on, and then make up your mind if it's something you like or not. (...) but I still prefer traditional, it gives you another option. It gives me another option and I want to know all the options I have and then decide for myself. I think everybody does that. It's a personal choice, I think.”

Interviewee 2 who is a traditional painter was one of the participants of the study holding very strong opinions against AI tools and went as far as to call them “disingenuous” and confessed from the point of view of someone who is very close to one’s tools and hand-paints his artworks:

“Hey, this is me, you know, so it's like with AI art, with painting. It's very disingenuous. (...)It's not as interesting, I think, the AI art because it just takes away that human experience, which is important, you know.”

Similar to Interviewee 2, Interviewee 11 also showed a strong disagreement with AI tools, but for different reasons. When asked whether she used or would consider using AI in her practice, she positions herself pro-technology and would consider using AI in the future if it would be an ethical solution, but for the moment believes that there are no excuses for the

unethical way AI tools have been developed, using art without permission from artists and sees not using it as a form of protest:

“So for now, I haven't because of a vendetta against it, actually. Because, as a visual artist, I know that the AI that is currently being used has been gathering their data and learning from the uncredited work of other visual artists. And I find that very problematic. And I also have a lot of friends that are artists and we all agreed that we would like to experiment with AI, if it would be in Fair Use condition, for example, if the artificial learning would give copyrights to the artists that they use their images, I would gladly use it because I feel like it's the future and we cannot run away but in the state that it is now is quite problematic and I really didn't want to touch it.”

One aspect that we could observe throughout the interviews was that the opinions were formulated to a large extent based on context. While most interviewees showed to be receptive to adopting the use of AI tools in their processes for commercial work, a certain barrier to using them in their personal projects and proclaiming ownership could be noticed. A good example that illustrates this instance is seen in the following excerpts from Interviewee 9:

“Yes, I have considered it especially when I look for stock pictures and I don't find what I want. I've considered using it to create the kind of pictures I need and also on a private graphic design projects. I wanted to do, create Christmas cards in a special kind of way and I tried it a little then but I didn't get the results I wanted but I've thought about it the last days here actually. And I'm really curious about Adobe's AI program when that will be released.”

“(...)it feels a bit wrong to say I made this because... just you can say you designed it in one way because you decided what comes out but you didn't make it, maybe. (...) It's a bit of a difference. I would say. Maybe. Yeah, it's hard.”

When we asked about the possibility of working with AI tools, interviewee 10 perceived it as a moral issue. However, a few days later after the interview, we got an email from interviewee 10:

Interviewee 10: “I am just writing you to let you know that our conversation led to an artwork with AI! I realised that I via ChatGPT could reimagine my artwork and ask her a bunch of

questions and advice. The conversation is now recorded and becoming an audio work. I will send it to you as soon as it is ready. I would never have thought of this if it wasn't for you guys - so thank you for opening my eyes :-)"

Our conversation changed the interviewee's attitude toward AI image generators from indifference to early adoption. She could achieve artistic innovation through oscillation to a more open network of relationships (Montanari, F. et al., 2016). This is a good example of the interaction between the creative and academic fields and how it contributed to new artworks. We could learn why the research on cultural and creative industries should be continued from the case.

5.2.3 Perceived social stigma as a barrier to AI adoption

Others have also hinted or even openly expressed their shame in using AI tools or the perspective of using them. This highlights the aforementioned tension that materializes in artists being pressed to lean towards one of the two instances, that of moral gatekeepers or early adopters which creates some tensions.

Visual artists applied moral standards to the role of artists and the value of artwork. This discussion has occurred across their input, creative process, and outcome. The moral standards are rooted in their personal belief, as well as social cognition. Although some visual artists find benefits from AI in their creative process and make steps forward to be early adopters, they tend to be aware of the social stigma.

Interviewer: Have you considered working with AI tools in your creative process?

Interviewee 10: "There will be no moral problems with that. For me. It's just a sketching tool. So I just haven't found... I just haven't really been looking for a way to work with the images like that, but I definitely see it as a valid sketching tool."

Interviewee 3, a young CG artist with more than 5 years of experience in working with digital tools admits that:

"I actually, I'm a bit ashamed to say it but I have got a subscription for MidJourney but it is it's so good for generating content material."

His shame is closer to internal shame as it originates inside the self and its main aspect is a self-conscious feeling. However, the ground of shame materializes in the meanings of the neoliberalist discourse (Reckwitz, 2017) rooted in society's moral standard and expected judgment from others towards his action. This opinion is enforced by Interviewee 6, a freelance graphic designer and illustrator from Denmark, who sees how using AI as a creative could be perceived as opportunistic because of the minimal effort involved in AI creations for profit:

“It's going to be so embarrassing for people who say they are creative and all of a sudden in the struggling game of creativity, facing capitalism, then they just go on and use this AI machine to make a lot of art. It's not going to be like a positive story for them. But budgets and crises and everything else could make people go that way and seek opportunities, but I believe if you are creative and an artist by heart then it conflicts with the ideas of handmade and the idea of people going to school for five years, being good at being creative.”

Interviewee 2 who is not using AI tools and shows a rejection stance towards AI, muses on the use of AI tools by others and how that would make them, from his point of view, want to hide this as it is something to feel ashamed of:

“For me personally, if I was using AI,(...)I'd be like, more quiet, keep to myself because I wouldn't want people to know that I'm using an AI or something, you know, If I'm using AI to help my work. So I think maybe hypothetically, that people who don't want to show that they're using AI might become more so themselves and like, talk less about how they do their work.”

And Interviewee 5 in spite of the fact that she shows a very progressive attitude towards the help AI tools could offer creatives to do better and faster work, still would not feel comfortable letting an AI tool do more than her in the creative process. Moreover, she perceives a strong correlation between the time and effort spent on creation with the value and ownership of the said creation:

“That's not an artist doing their thing. But for an artist, I have to do something that I have to participate in, in the creative process I have to do it by myself with my hands or other computer-generated tools like Photoshop or anything, but I have to use my time. Like, if

there's a loss of time, I won't feel that comfortable creating things, I would feel like oh, that's, that's not doing. Yeah. Yeah, there would be a feeling of guilt that oh, it's not the work that I created. It's by AI."

The same view is voiced by Interviewee 1 who is portraying how she personally values an artwork and how she believes most people also do:

"Sometimes the process is more interesting and said Man, this person works a million years to make this tiny little thing. I'm gonna value it so I like it, I'm loving the story behind it. I wanted something like that."

What seemed to make the participants hesitate in making a clear stance as to what they identify themselves as were the ethical issues that have been eloquently brought up throughout the interviews. Seeing as the development of the phenomenon is quite recent, these tools only emerging and becoming popular in just the last couple of months, there are many regulatory issues not addressed that constitute a gray area where the creatives interviewed seemed unwilling to thread. In the order of importance as reflected by the number of mentions (in 3 of the 11 interviews), unethical development of the databases and wrong practices of feeding data into these tools such as stealing from other artists, and appropriating their styles was the most prevalent objection towards AI use. As Interviewee 9 explains:

"But it's also like an ethics discussion when AI is trained on pictures that are not allowed and everything like that. And that's the part that I feel very much needs to be discussed. And there have to be laws and stuff because I don't want them to use pictures they're not allowed to use if there is a, like an artist that has spent a lot of hours, maybe years to develop their own style and then AI can use their style to do new features."

One additional issue which came up in the interview was the legal copyright issues and attribution difficulties in the cases of AI-generated art:

Interviewee 5: "Like they're not really, there's no kind of like specific law that is like for copyrights or any about the authorship, about AI-generated work. And for people like us, they have stated clearly that they won't allow it, they won't really agree with the authorship of AI."

So, because of that, like different countries, they have different laws that is, like generated now.”

Law is a means of managing the intersection of intimate interpersonal relations and economic activity (Zelizer, 2005b, as cited in Zelizer, 2011, p.386). What was revealed in the interviews matches the meanings behind cartoons and comics illustrating a rapport between creators and AI tools or robots:

Image 2 describes how a cartoonist uses AI image generators to create his cartoon. He uses pen, ink, and paper, in contrast to the screen. We can see the cartoonist is positioned as an early adopter, but his wicked smile gives the impression that this cartoon intrigues moral judgment by readers. On the other hand, many cartoons apply strong moral standards to AI image generators. AI image generators steal artists' work, which they put a lot of effort into, behind their backs (images 5 and 9). A cartoonist raises questions about whether artists who use AI image-generators are real artists (Image 6). Artists as insiders exert their power by splitting artists into real and fake. Other than the artists themselves, they ask about the right value of artwork when it is generated by a mathematical model (Image 7). Based on the printed outcome, the crying face implies that AI-generated art is not right for the value of the artwork. The moral standard says art is made of human creativity, not by a math model.

For some artists, AI-image generators are doing “dirty work (Zelizer, 2011, p.33)” to legitimize their business by transforming it into flourishing human creativity. The subscribers' “dirty money (p.90)” will be used to run this “black market (p.67)” which is unacceptable because people treat human creativity as less sacred commercial products. In the black market, people talk less about how they do their work with AI (interviewee 2) because they are not proud of being part of it. The service, subscription fee, and market in the neutral status turned to collectively or individually as demeaned (p.117) and non-moral. However, others lower their moral standards when they see economic benefits from using AI-image generators. Moral standards have fluidity interacting with social and economic values.

5.2.4. AI acceptable by most as a tool but not as a complete solution

Almost all interviewees rejected the idea of using the AI image generative tools as a full-standing solution and what made them consider it as an acceptable idea was to use it as either a sketching tool, a starting point, or a helping tool in researching ideas. Interviewee 2 in order to explain his point of view created an analogy for using AI, to how someone would buy a furniture item from IKEA and pretend it was created by the buyer:

“Well, I mean, it depends on how they use it, you know? If I go back to the IKEA example, where if he took the table and he didn't really assemble it as they did and like, you know, you change this completely so that it's almost unrecognizable. Then maybe, but if it's like the same table and you just painted over it like, or like took away one leg or something, it's not creativity is not like you creating something, but if the AI is creating the thing for you, then what's the point of you being there? You know, for you to do it? If the AI is gonna make it then we have, like 80% or 90% of the like, the pleasure of creating something gone.”

Interviewee 1 is also repelled by the prospect of people using an AI tool with minimal effort or involvement in directing the creative process:

“I've also noticed that some people just make something and they just take that something and use it, for let's say a journal design cover and then they sell it and they do nothing, they don't change anything. So that's wrong. I think from that point of view. I think it's a line.”

Not necessarily in contrast with this view, but as an additional perspective that enriches the dimension of artists' views, Interviewee 8, having the quality of new media artist and that of having used AI for a long time, started adopting AI as a helping tool to streamline work. However, after mastering how to create better textual inputs, she admits that the results are so good sometimes that she finds that nothing could be further done to the generated images and they are ready to use or deliver without human intervention or post-processing.

“But thinking about it in detail, I said, hey, but a starting point I can have, I mean I can replace some of my work to make it more efficient with AI, and then customize it and customize it the way I want it in my existing programs, me using Procreate. Said and done pretty much that was the strategy and since then I've been using MidJourney pretty much constantly up to this point. (...) But after I started to master the tool better, I was happier

about the result it gave me. And I've often stuck with that result because I really liked it. I felt I had nothing more to add. From that point of view, I think AI helps very, very much and it really matters, how you convey your idea to it and what you want it to bring you, to build on your imagination.”

Artists' perspectives offer important insights into how they negotiate the meanings (Zelizer, 2011) of AI in different roles and make impositions or draw barriers to how much they allow to be taken over. Their creative processes are something that they hold close and dear and are at this moment not amenable to letting pass over in spite of external pressures, especially in the case of personal projects. The critique towards AI is more pronounced when made from a group stance. However, from a more individual stance, they show a level of openness if certain conditions are met. Also, there is a problematization of what the artists' true skills are. Is it how to draw the subject as close as to what they want it to look as possible or how to type a good prompt so that AI generators can make good artwork? Artists' true skills are newly negotiated in the age of AI.

Interestingly, our interviewees assumed that most of the consumers would be satisfied with AI-generated artwork if it achieved some level of artistic criteria. However, as Bandelj, N., & Gibson, C. W. (2019) pointed out, consumers (a) earmark their money, (b) build trust or repair mistrust in exchanges, (c) negotiate power and inequality through consumption practices, and (d) walk the terrain of morally tinged commodification. Visual artists' tension between moral gatekeepers and early adopters and meanings associated with this will be negotiated according to consumers' attitudes to the AI-generated artwork.

5.3. Between confidence and precarity: finding good matches in the age of AI

“Good matches (Zelizer, 2006) demonstrate and enact agreements between the partners in a relationship. They share an understanding of what that relationship is (Zelizer, 2011, p.154).” Visual artists are in a relationship with their clients to provide “good artwork” in economic transactions. People are connected with money and, more generally, economic activities with their varying social relations, especially intimate ties (p.166). Visual artists and clients would sometimes cheat, hurt, disappoint, and fail their [close] partners (p.168) under the effect of AI. Intimate ties between visual artists and clients could be stronger than thought, or they

would find other meanings in the relationship or try to cling to one another to maintain economic transactions. In any case, AI figures as a new additional factor that already started to have effects on interactions in the market.

5.3.1. AI is “just a tool” – (ir)replaceability of the human

Although AI is merely standing there, artists perceive it differently depending on their working fields, competency in their skills, individual time frame, or even exposure level to media. This is why our constructionist view in this research is meaningful. Their perception decides their attitude toward AI between confidence and precarity. We asked about the contribution of artists and AI in the AI-generated artwork.

Interviewee 4: “I think [the contribution of the artist] is more than 90%. Anyway, even if AI makes it for you, it's up to the writer to choose what fits the image. (...) In art, I think it was just that kind of form after modern times.”

Interviewee 4 raised the hand of the artist’s intention, referring to modern art. Across the interviews, artists mentioned the case of photography and printing similar to AI. Even though the machine is at the center of the creative process and artwork cannot be done without it, the artist’s intention matters to have the desired outcome. Artists do not create the world, but they capture the “right moment” or even expect to “get lucky” from the world itself. Cameras and printers play a role as artistic tools, but AI is in the middle of a discussion. AI is a good enough tool, but not at a human level currently. However, we do not know how much it will be improved in the future and succeed human artists.

Some artists show confidence as human beings, regarding AI as a creative tool. They believed in their artistic skills (interviewee 1), decent eye and human intelligence (interviewee 6), communication and strategic practice (interviewee 3).

Interviewee 1: “But what people are threatened in that point of view by is when they believe AI will replace at some point, the creator, which is not. It's just a tool, it's probable it will replace in some points it won't in other points. It's an interesting tool we invented. It is not that terrible.”

Interviewee 6: “I only think that they still don't have the eye for a good illustration. It still going to be a hope there's going to be this period where they use it and then I'll see that it

lacks some kind of extra layer or intelligence.”

Interviewee 3: “I think what humans can do what the AI cannot necessarily do at this time is they can help you understand better what you want out of your brand and what, what are the messages you want to put out and put a certain focus on that and think strategically in a larger scale and more macro scale. (...) I think a client who has worked with you for a long time and even if they cannot see the value immediately if they try to go the AI route, they will eventually come back to you because, at the end of the day, there is something there that the AI cannot give you.”

5.3.2. Leveraging human connection

Especially, communication and strategic practice can be established in long-term relationships, so it implies the importance of a trusted network in the age of AI. A trusted network means differentiated and meaningful social relations (Zelizer, 2012)” for “good matches (2006)”. Also, networking contributes to storytelling in artworks.

Interviewee 1: “You can't sell anything without the story and to be to have some money from your art. You also have to sell a story in some way and to sell a story you have to have connections I mean, create a connection maybe a community might be something human wise. (...) I think rarely people these days... rarely people just buy the art itself. They buy the whole package, the whole deal. That differentiates you from other people.”

A good story distinguishes the artist from other artists at the micro level but also does human artists from AI at the macro level. Just as models are regarded as the “whole package” including personality, reputation, on-the-job performance, and appearance (Mears, 2011), artists are seen as a “whole package” by their clients, audiences, and even themselves. Interviewee 4 confessed the emotional labour as a human artist, which is different from AI.

“I think that person liked to talk to me because I'm a human being, not AI. I think that's why [the relationship] became more personal. (...) There's pressure to be a bright person. (...) I don't show my calm side to people. Because of that, my personality looks cool outside and hyper. Everyone knows me like that, so sometimes it's kind of tiring and burdensome. (...) These days, sub-characters are really popular. That's why I felt like that. It's just another me and my current emotional state has changed from the previous topic, but I feel like I need to maintain the past. That's kind of hard these days.”

This testimony proved that mismatches in their relationship management lead to upset or emotional destabilization for artists (Musgrave, G., 2023). Interviewee 3 also mentioned “mental work” by artists in the process of creative work:

“[AI] lacks a bit of, of soul I would say (...) Your time and your efforts and all that mental work that you've been doing to bring life into this image is what makes it art. (...) The human touch I think is something that's never going to be replaced. Could be, could be, could be hopeful, wishful thinking.”

This mental work in the creative process is different from the emotional labour in networking but similar in that they are definitely what AI cannot possess. Both contribute to the human artist’s competitive advantage as well as increased precarity. What emerges from the data shows that from a relational work perspective, artists might cope with the decreased job security and working opportunity in the AI world with networking and relationship building. Interviewee 3 shows that visual artists are aware of the advantages of relational work for attenuating labor commodification and precarity (Alacovska, Bucher, & Fieseler, 2022).

“When, if the jobs are even more scarce because of AI, you're able to basically literally open doors for future companies and future work positions by getting to know people, by having a conversation or a coffee, by giving people a compliment, or by being a nice person.”

Another aspect is that artists can focus less on networking when they become self-reliant with the help of AI.

Interviewee 9: “There is a risk that you can be more isolated because you can use tools from different areas and you don't work together in the same way. But I hope not again, I like the social parts.”

Even during Covid-19, which was a time of increased precarity for most, many artists kept collaborating together. Artists might focus on their social parts, even if networking becomes less important in the AI world. According to Montanari, F. et al. (2016), relational work contributes to the development and implementation of their artistic ideas. However, no one knows where AI will lead us in the future.

Interviewee 6: “It's totally scary. Like, I completely understand the people who are raising

their hands now and saying, Oh, what is this monster we created and it's going really fast and for one year ago it couldn't do it and now we can do everything and trick people, but it's also really exciting. It's like watching like a thriller or something. You don't know how it's going to end. It's like a plot and you have this uncontrollable force. And I'm also like, curious how far can it go?"

5.3.3. Fear of replacement and of financial loss or co-creation with AI?

In contrast to the confidence in the social sphere, artists often felt precarity in the economic sphere. They compared themselves with the AI, which created a mix of confidence and precarity.

Interviewee 6: "Is this good enough to replace me? It's like an ex-boyfriend's new girlfriend like you comparing it a lot to what can this do that I can do and can it somehow replace me? The first time I saw it I wasn't that impressed."

When visual artists described their precarity, they chose economic terms such as budget, price, and efficiency from a business perspective.

Interviewee 8: "It is possible that prices are implicitly lower because the market, in general, is somehow decided by quality versus time for precisely if we talk about efficiency. (...) You can't quantify [works of art] in money, I mean they're always going to cost a lot of money, precisely because they're valuable."

Interviewee 6 heard the if-decision from a client and pointed out the current precarious working conditions of visual artists. Maybe the future working conditions would get worse according to the client (editor)'s comment.

"I don't know if it's a joke, but the editor who said 'Well, we still have we still have money or budget for real illustrators'. But when they say we have to like cut budgets, then we're going to use AI and I was like, oh, let's not do that. But that could be like a reality. (...) Well, they don't pay illustrators enough already. (...) a lot of people are working for free."

Artists have informal labour practices and tend to have fewer economic benefits in intimate

and closer relationships (Alacovska, 2018). Interviewee 3 expressed the fear of replacement in the job position. It could come from his art fields (3D/CG art) but could be also related to the exposure level to media. The interviewee showed the will to continue artistic activities in the social sphere, even if he was replaced by AI.

Interviewer: Do you think your job position might be affected by AI tools in companies?

Interviewee 3: 100%. But it's, it's very scary, scary times. (...) if the time comes when I cannot work as a creative because AI has... If everybody decides to use AI instead of real people then I'll go work at the restaurant again. (...) I can do my... I can do my art at home for my people.

My (social media feed) page is mostly AI stuff. It's a little bit overwhelming. Sometimes it's too much to have like you're able to see the whole picture. (...) So it's a little bit overwhelming at times, like feeling left behind or they gonna lose, they're gonna find a replacement for my job and I'm not ever going to know it, you know?

There are various fields in visual arts, and the level of precarity was different by field. Many artists expected that (traditional) painters, craftsmen, and fine artists would not be affected by AI much. However, digital artists and industrial (commercial) designers were highly anticipated to be replaced by AI. Artist's own style and resources were mentioned as a competitive advantage against AI.

Interviewee 2: "It could be that people lean more to AI and to save money and stuff like that. But in general, I don't think I don't think painters are really that heavily affected because, you know, you have your own style and resource presenting your own image, and then AI can't really compete. It's just competing its own area. And mostly what I've seen is people will do it with digital art."

Interviewer: Then that means the commercial artists can be replaced by AI, do you think?

Interviewee 5: "Yeah, I think probably yes. Because that might cost less money. Because most of the time, they will hire people, or they will outsource it to some other artists or freelance artists, but now they can use a tool. And some tools or maybe I think either they're free or they're, they're, they're quick, or they're not costing too much."

Also, Interviewee 2 expected that level of artistic skills might decide the chance of replacement.

“So I think there's an effect in the low level maybe not like low medium level but then when you're like an established artist [in the music industry] you would then want like a nice like, piece of art on your own your album cover or something.”

Image 1 shows artists' confidence and precarity toward AI image generators. At Comic-Con, an AI robot sits on the desk during the meet the artist session. We can observe the precarity of human artists, replaced by AI image generators. However, the robot's facial expression looks anxious between a computer and a smartphone. It seems like mocking AI as just a tool for human creativity. On the other hand, most of the cartoons paint artists' precarity in their drawings. Human artists disappeared in creative events (Image 1) and symbolic space (Image 3), and AI replaced them (Image 8). AI image generators copy artists' work and create new ones quickly with high quality (Images 5 and 9). AI generator's self-portrait comes from sources on the internet, but they regard them as human artists with photo-realistic sketches (Image 4). “Real” artists who draw by themselves feel lost and frustrated by “fake” artists who use AI image generators (Image 6). Self-mockingly, when AI generator is well trained they feel insecure about their artwork (Image 7).

5.3.4. Beyond artists versus AI perspective

Some interviewees mentioned the possibility of collaboration with AI. We can observe that artists are trying to adapt to new situations and negotiate their boundaries. In a positive way, collaboration can bring more working opportunities (interviewee 8) or change working styles for better outcomes (interviewee 9).

Interviewee 8: “Why do I say, collaborator? Because from a collaborator you expect it to help you and at the same time be able to communicate and give you feedback. At this point in time, in this 2023 stage of technology. Yes, we're being offered answers.” (...) If we use it in a collaborative way I really think it can increase our number of clients and can bring us a plus in the work we deliver to them.”

Interviewee 9: “I've been thinking about it, yes. Like will my job disappear when AI can create a lot of pictures but I don't think it will disappear. I think it will change maybe how you work but I still think they will need creative people. But maybe we use AI tools more in the coming years. (...) And it's a bit the same with like with designers that you get better work. If

you give them a good brief. It's easier to get what you want. And maybe if people start using AI tools they can also give designers and artists better briefs in the future. So that could be something that is good, maybe.”

Still, the copyright and ownership issue was not solved despite the increasing use of AI. Interviewee 2 imagines the strange future of copyright where artists have to prove their creative process.

“You can take them, you can take the post down or whatever because you have the copyright but in AI, an interesting thing. It's no one owns it really, you know, it's like no copyright like there's no no one owns it, like the person can't claim it. (...) Copyright in the future is going to be very strange. Where you Yeah, everybody has proved everything they did. video record themselves painting for however long the painting.”

In this section, we could observe how artists engage in relational work to develop and implement their artistic idea (Montanari, F. et al., 2016) and to attenuate labour commodification and precarity by shaping meaningful client relations (Alacovska, A., & Bille, T., 2021). To decrease the precarity of artists in the economic sphere and support their confidence in the social sphere, the copyright and ownership issue should be seriously dealt with. Visual artists ask questions of justice and fairness: "Is the compensation fair? For whom? What defines fairness? Who defines it? (Zelizer, 2011, p.14) " Their perception of working conditions is closely linked to the commoditization of arts and moral judgment on it.

5.4. Analysis summary

The result of the present research allows us to reach the aim of navigating visual artists' boundaries in the age of AI from a relational work perspective. Through the analysis, we could identify tensions between the social sphere and the economic sphere in the artists' "connected lives (Zelizer, 2010)". Table 2 illustrates visual artists' relational work in the age of AI in three categories: Moral gatekeeper versus Early adopter (section 5.1), Passion versus Commodity (section 5.2), and Confidence versus Precarity (section 5.3). Each is located at the opposite end of the spectrum, and each individual artist has his/her attitude in between.

The social sphere Intimate relations Intrinsic values (moral, emotional)	The economic sphere Economic activities Economic/instrumental value
Passion	Commodity
Moral gatekeeper	Early adopter
Confidence	Precarity

Table 1. Visual artists' relational work in the age of AI

These boundaries are constantly negotiated in various contexts. Concepts on either end often intersect across social/economic spheres and contribute to shaping individual attitudes. There are no clear boundaries between these tensions and the combination of two opposites. The three research questions will now be answered separately in the next section.

6. Conclusion and discussion

6.1. Concluding discussion

The first research question of how visual artists negotiate boundaries between their own creative work and AI-aided work can be answered as follows. As a few of the artists attach the notion of shame to their using or trying AI tools, it can be assumed that there is a stigma in other artists' use of AI in their practices and an attitude of condemning such actions. Moreover, they tend to associate the use of AI tools with low skills and materialism or seeking higher profits rather than mastery and self-actualization by one's own means. These perceptions emphasize that those who use AI accept to a higher degree that their art is commodified and placed more in the economic sphere than the personal sphere and negotiate meanings (Zelizer, 2012) to a larger extent compared to those who don't use AI. Moreover, the interviewees highlighted the necessity of compromising and working for profits as a way to survive and also have time and resources to create from passion which echoes Bandelj's (2020) findings. The rejection and harsher critique come when collective expressions are voiced with the propensity in the online environment, while individual artists tend to hold a more balanced attitude negotiated through context and expressing that certain conditions would make AI easier to accept and adopt.

The second research question of how visual artists establish boundaries with other artists who use AI can be answered as follows. The dynamic for taking a stance and positioning themselves as more of a moral gatekeeper than that of an early adopter is aligned with Zelizer's (2012) relational perspective and social connections (Bandelj, 2020) and it is influenced by ethical and moral values, by peers' perception and impression on the AI tools as well as the societal expectation and standards for an artist. A further component to consider is media, or content that is created around the theme of using these AI generative image tools. Just two of the interviewees completely refused to use AI and that is in the present circumstances. Be that AI tools would become more ethical in their development and transparent in how they learn and what materials they use, most artists would be open to

using them. Then there is also the matter of the degree of integration in the creative process. Three stances could be identified: (1) that of complete adoption or replacement of the artist's work, (2) that of co-creation but where the artist's input has to be considerably over that of the AI tool, and (3) that of AI tool being a starting point in sketching the idea of an artwork. We found out that the one with the highest influence is that of AI as a tool, followed by the idea of co-creating with AI which was already confirmed by the literature sources as well (Limin, 2019; Olszewska, 2020; Lee, 2022; Chong, 2022). The interest definitely exists in that all the artists' interviewed read the news about AI and have at least thought about what their professional future would look like.

The third research question of how is the relationship between visual artists and clients mediated in the market with the rising popularity of AI tools can be answered as follows. At this moment, AI is somewhat similar to cameras and printers as creative tools for visual artists. However, we do not know how it will be developed in the future. Some artists who see AI as a creative tool showed confidence as human beings. They stressed human superiority in artistic skills; decent eye and human intelligence; and communication and strategic practice. Networking was one of their coping strategies against AI as a means of long-term trustful relationships and storytelling. Visual artists are aware of the advantages of relational work as a means of attenuating labor commodification and precarity (Alacovska, Bucher, & Fieseler, 2022). However, they also felt emotional precarity from mismatches in their relationship (Musgrave, G., 2023), and mental work in the creative process contributed to their precarity as well. Even though artists become self-reliant with the help of AI, they might focus on relational work for artistic innovation (Montanari, F. et al., 2016). Visual artists generally expressed confidence in their social sphere but often felt precarity from allocated budget, price, and efficiency in the economic sphere. Informal labour practices in the art scene are already making artists' livelihoods precarious (Alacovska, 2018), and their precarity is expected to get worse due to job replacement in the age of AI. The level of precarity is assumed to be associated with media exposure regarding AI news. We observed different perceptions of precarity depending on their fields and skill level. Digital artists and industrial (commercial) designers felt the threat of being replaced by AI, rather than (traditional) painters, craftsmen, and fine artists. Beyond the artist versus AI perspective, collaboration with AI can bring more working opportunities and changed working styles for

better outcomes. However, copyright and ownership issues are still debated in spite of the increasing use of AI.

6.2. Contribution

6.2.1. *Theoretical contribution*

Our study contributes to the literature on artists' relational work by providing three key theoretical contributions:

- Firstly, we observe a sense of negotiation that occurs at the level of the self between the passionate ego and the alter (Stoltz, D. S. (1), & Pitluck, A. Z. (2), 2021), which is reflective of Zelizer's Relational Package (2012). This highlights the importance of the relational aspect and the dynamic in the tension between passion and commodity.
- Secondly, we explore how individual artists transition into moral gatekeepers (Andersson Cederholm, E., & Sjöholm, C., 2021) and negotiate meanings on AI-generated work. We find that artists use open and weak ties not only for artistic innovation (Montanari, F. et al., 2016) but for their protest as "class-for-itself (Standing, 2011, as cited in Bain and McLean, 2013)."
- Lastly, we demonstrate how technology affects artists' relational work in a high-tech society, where boundaries are constantly shifting and hard to define. The tension and even fluidity between boundaries are more meaningful in the current society, highlighting the need for a comprehensive understanding of artists' relational work in the age of AI.

Overall, our study provides insights into the complex and dynamic nature of artists' relational work, contributing to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing artists in the age of AI.

6.2.2. Practical contribution

As AI continues to evolve, it is clear that the art scene is changing, and visual artists have a unique perspective on these changes. We could gain insights into cultural and creative industries through interviews with artists. These insights might be transferable to other industries and societies. One crucial area of research is the development of sustainable working conditions for visual artists. By understanding their perceptions of AI and its impact on their work, we can create conditions that promote sustainable creativity in the art scene.

While our research initially focused on relational work, including work security, relations with AI tools, and relationships with peers, we discovered another significant issue: the potential impact of AI on the creativity of future generations. Some artists expressed concern that the ease of access and fast processing of AI tools could make individuals less likely to exercise creative thinking and put in the effort to develop their unique style and perspective over time. These concerns reflect the artists' own experiences and perspectives on the maturation process.

If sustainable working conditions are not established early in the development of AI, we risk losing human artists, and AI-generated art may become the norm based on popularity rather than creativity. Future generations have the right to enjoy and appreciate the rich cultural heritage of the human race, and sustainable working conditions for artists are a prerequisite for sustainable creativity.

6.3. Limitation

There are several limitations to the research. One limitation is related to gender, with most of the interviewed artists being female (9 out of 11). While this is not uncommon in the art industry, it does limit the generalizability of the findings to male artists' experiences. Future research should aim to address this imbalance and include more male artists in the sample.

Another limitation is that only a couple of interviewees (interviewee 3, 8) actively used AI in their creative process. While this may reflect the current state of the art industry, it limits the insights we can gain into the impact of AI on creativity and working conditions. Further

research should aim to include more artists who use AI in their creative process to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Additionally, it focused on artists working in digital-friendly countries, which may not represent the experiences of artists working in other regions. While digital technologies have become increasingly important in the art industry, there are still many artists who work primarily in traditional media or who may not have access to the same technological resources as artists in more developed regions. As a result, the findings of this research may not be fully representative of the experiences of all artists working in the age of AI.

6.4. Further studies

In the age of AI, the working conditions of visual artists have been significantly impacted, and there is a need for further research to better understand the challenges and opportunities presented by these new technologies. One important area of investigation is the relationship between media exposure related to AI and the precarity of visual artists' working conditions. It is possible that artists who are more frequently exposed to news related to AI may feel more precarity, and future research could delve into the role of media in shaping public perceptions of the use of AI in art and its impact on artists' job security and wages.

Another important area of research is the historical context of social and political movements in the visual art scene, and how these movements have impacted the use of AI in art. By examining how artists have used technology to challenge established power structures and to create art that reflects social and political issues, researchers can gain valuable insights into the role of AI in promoting artistic freedom and expression.

In addition, it is essential to recognize the significant challenges that artists face regarding copyright and ownership in the age of AI. As AI-generated art continues to gain traction, artists are increasingly vulnerable to the precarious nature of labor and gig work. The current legal and ethical considerations surrounding AI-generated art ownership and distribution can have severe consequences for artists, affecting their ability to earn a living wage and maintain creative control over their work. These challenges can lead to a sense of insecurity and

instability, highlighting the need for comprehensive research and legal frameworks that prioritize the rights and well-being of artists.

Finally, further research is needed to investigate the new emergence of art in the AI world and the potential it holds for artists. By analyzing the different types of art that are emerging, such as machine-generated art, researchers can gain a better understanding of the impact these technologies are having on the art industry and the public's perception of art.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Interview guide

1. Tell me about yourself briefly - Your field, artworks, job title, employment type, years of experience ...
2. Do you follow news or updates on social media related to AI tools for the creative industries? - fear of replacement
3. Have you uploaded any postings or comments on social platforms regarding AI related topics? - Collective protest
4. Have you tried to use AI image generators? If yes, can you describe the experience and how it made you feel?
5. If you put a name tag on AI image generator, what would you call them? (e.g. assistant, collaborator, tool, enemy, threat, artist)

[Creative process]

6. Would you consider or have you considered working with such tools in your creative process? And why? (RQ1)
7. How do you appreciate the value of artist contribution and AI contribution in the creation of an AI-generated artwork? (RQ1)
8. Do you regard the value of an artwork based on its aesthetics only or is the art process more valuable to you ? (RQ1)
9. Are you willing to collaborate with other artists who actively use AI tools in their creative process? (RQ2)
10. What would you say if your friend artists are gonna use AI in their artwork? (RQ2)
11. Do you believe there is a trend or an urgency for creators to adopt such tools?

[Working conditions]

12. How do you get your projects or sell your artworks?
 - a. Sharing clients
 - b. Co-working place

13. How do you get paid for your artworks? Is there any difference in payment depending on the relationship to the person commissioning you? (e.g. monetary / non-monetary)

14. Do you find any changes in your job security or working opportunity after the appearance of AI image generator? (RQ3)
 - a. The number of projects/clients
 - b. Price rate/wage
 - c. If someone asks you for a type of work that you are not an expert in, would you rather recommend a colleague or are you open to using an AI tool to help you complete the work and meet the client's needs?
 - d. Do you think your loyal clients will continue working with you even if AI is cheaper and easy to use? [freelancers / self-employed]
 - e. Do you think your job position might be affected by the adoption of AI tools in companies? [Full/part-time]

15. Do you have any plans to learn how to use new digital tools?

16. Do you see the networking activities as important for artists in this era?
 - a. Do you have your website or instagram account on your artworks?
 - i. Do you separate personal account and work account?
 - b. Do you attend any parties or community events?
 - c. Stimulating network or being isolated?

Appendix 2 – Cartoons, comics and art for Document analysis

Image 1.

<https://cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/ai-art>

“AI art has the potential to transform the industry, not necessarily for the better.” In the Comic Con, AI is drawing a human with a pen between other digital mediums: computer and phone, during the meet the artists session. The face of AI does not look happy and looks anxious.

Image 2.

<https://www.newyorker.com/cartoons/daily-cartoon/bonus-daily-cartoon-artifice-intelligence>

A Cartoonist who works for New Yorker is using an AI image generator with the description “Brilliant new yorker cartoon.” AI shows several images of series for the search text. He is starting to draw a cartoon with his ink pen on paper, looking at readers over his shoulder with a wicked smile.

Image 3.

<https://www.exoplatform.com/blog/cartoon-of-the-week-ai-to-conquer-montmartre/>

"AI to conquer Montmartre" One of the most artistic places in the world is Montmartre in Paris, France. It used to be full of human artists, but AI replaced them on the street. AI is drawing people's portraits as human artists did.

Image 4.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/comics/2023/02/14/ai-in-illustration/>

AI is drawing its portrait, looking at itself on the mirror of a web browser. AI's face is man's and looks like a high-quality sketch with a pencil.

Image 5.

<https://cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/artist-vs-ai>

“A computer looks over the shoulder of a painter as he works, in an effort to learn "how' the artist paints. Are artists in danger of being replaced by artificial intelligence as computers teaches itself how to paint by studying hundreds of artists' styles and techniques, which took them a lifetime to learn, to produce its own artwork?”

Image 6.

<https://www.artstation.com/artwork/4XYYQI>

A human wearing a hoodie lettered with AI art is announcing, "I'm a real 'artist.' Look at my art." He is showing his drawing in front of people in the gallery but is connected to the AI machine behind. AI is scanning other artists' works in the gallery, and artists are looking at what is happening with dazed and hurt faces, putting their knees on the ground.

Image 7.

<https://www.newyorker.com/cartoons/daily-cartoon/wednesday-january-11th-ai-art>

"We've trained the A.I. art generator so well that it now feels too insecure about its work to make any art." Two scientists are standing in front of the big machine and waiting for the AI-generated artwork. Its buttons look like plus, minus, and many dots, implying a mathematical model of an AI art generator. The outcome from the printer is a drawing of a sad face with tears.

Image 8.

<https://cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/artificial-intelligence-10>

AI is drawing a portrait of a smiling human with only black ink on white paper. The outcome is a QR code, which implies different generated artworks that look all the same. QR code is easy to make in a short time. The viewer cannot access the artwork without a digital device.

Image 9.

<https://cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/soulless-ai-art>

"Soulless (AI) Art" Michelangelo is standing beside the sculpture of the Pietà. He is holding graving tools with his blooded hands, surrounded by a sketch of the sculpture, a broken tool, and a skeleton surrounding him. Skeleton implies his dedicated life to the arts for trial and error. However, AI scanned his sculpture, codified his artwork on the screen, and generated the exact same Pietà in a short time. Michelangelo is watching the moment with his dark face.

Appendix 3 – Netnography

No.	Post	Published date	Number of comments	Number of likes
1	#noAI manifesto on Facebook by Loish digital artist https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=704587277705530&set=a.293091092188486	Dec 15, 2022	1600	21000
2	#noAI manifesto on Facebook by Claudya S. Alector's Artwork https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=700256071660105&set=a.582208330131547	Dec 19, 2022	86	862
3	Twitter post by ArtStation https://twitter.com/ArtStationHQ/status/1603895181832601600	Dec 14, 2022	2597	
4	YouTube video of Aaron Blaise Disney Animator reacting to an AI Animation https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xm7BwEsdVbQ	Mar 9 2023	5565	81000

No to AI generated images on ArtStation

<https://www.theverge.com/2022/12/23/23523864/artstation-removing-anti-ai-protest-artwork-censorship>

Appendix 4 – Message sent to possible participants

Dear [Interviewee's Name],

We hope this email finds you well. We are Alina and Heejae, master students specializing in culture and creativity management at Lund University. Currently, we are conducting research for our master thesis on the topic of working conditions and perspectives of visual artists in the AI world.

As expert in the field of visual art, we believe that your insights and experiences would be invaluable to our research. Therefore, we would like to request an interview with you to discuss your perspectives on the topic.

We are flexible in terms of meeting preferences and would be happy to meet with you online or offline, depending on what you prefer. If you prefer to meet online, we can schedule a video call at a time that is convenient for you. If you prefer to meet offline, we are willing to travel to your location if it is within a reasonable distance from Lund.

We understand that your time is valuable and we assure you that the interview will not take more than an hour. We are also flexible in terms of scheduling and would be more than happy to work around your availability.

Please let us know if you are available for an interview and what meeting format would be convenient for you. We would greatly appreciate your contribution to our research and thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Best regards,

Alina Dumea and Heejae Jun

Appendix 5 – Description of Interviewees

No.	Job title	Employment type	Gender	Nationality	Years of experience	Interview Date	Interview duration	Interview language
1	Graphic designer and illustrator	Full-time	Female	Romania	10 years+	April 5, 2023	1h 22min	English
2	Painter	Freelance	Male	Yemen	3-5 years	April 5, 2023	52min	English
3	3D / CG artist	Full-time	Male	Greece	5-10 years	April 7, 2023	1h 16min	English
4	Installation artist	Freelance	Female	South Korea	5-10 years	April 10, 2023	52min	Korean
5	Animator	Freelance	Female	China	under 3 years	April 17, 2023	1h 15min	English
6	Graphic designer and illustrator	Freelance	Female	Denmark	5-10 years	April 17, 2023	1h 2min	English
7	Painter	Freelance	Female	South Korea	5-10 years	April 19, 2023	58min	Korean
8	New media artist	Freelance	Female	Romania	3-5 years	April 20, 2023	55min	Romanian
9	Graphic designer	Full-time	Female	Sweden	5-10 years	April 20, 2023	50min	English
10	Painter and 3D artist	Freelance	Female	Denmark	10 years+	April 25, 2023	38min	English
11	Graphic designer and illustrator	Full-time	Female	Romania	5-10 years	May 2, 2023	1h 2 min	English

<i>Job title</i>	Frequency	Percent
Graphic designer and illustrator	4	36%
3D / CG artist	1	9%
Animator	1	9%
Installation artist	1	9%
New media artist	1	9%
Painter	2	18%
Painter and 3D artist	1	9%
Grand Total	11	100%

<i>Employment type</i>	Frequency	Percent
Freelance	7	64%
Full-time	4	36%
Grand Total	11	100%

<i>Gender</i>	Frequency	Percent
Female	9	82%
Male	2	18%
Grand Total	11	100%

<i>Nationality</i>	Frequency	Percent
Romania	3	27%
Denmark	2	18%
South Korea	2	18%
China	1	9%
Greece	1	9%
Sweden	1	9%
Yemen	1	9%
Grand Total	11	100%

<i>Years of experience</i>	Frequency	Percent
10 years+	2	18%
5-10 years	6	55%
3-5 years	2	18%
under 3 years	1	9%
Grand Total	11	100%

Appendix 6 – Codes and Themes emerged from the data

Codes	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reluctance to work with friends/family; - Art as commodity; - Passionate about the creative process; - Productivity of art as a market product; - Art for art's sake from passion; using AI for monetary gains; - Marketing the artist persona; - Open to use AI for commercial purposes; - Negotiating art style for commercial work; - Art to be exhibited, for people to enjoy, not as a commodity, to be owned; - Aesthetic and process or intention behind and artwork are equally important. 	<p>(1) between passion and commodity</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Early adopter attitude, but not interested in using it; - Shame for using AI; - Moral gatekeeping for adoption on a large scale – there could be negative implications; - Negative effects for the future generations; - Ethical issues; - Just a tool; - Human intention and creativity is prioritized; - Help creators work faster; - Acceptable for commercial work; - Following news about AI; - Resistance to using AI; - Creator input / AI as good as the artist. 	<p>(2) between moral gatekeeper and early adopter</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confidence in artistic skills leads to not using AI; - The importance of networking in the AI era with decreased jobs; - Exposure to AI-related media articles might affect the artist's perception of precarity; - Increased precarity; - Polarization of precarity in creative class; - copyright and ownership; - Against AI; - Economic perspective; - Co-existing with AI; - Reshaping of the workscape; - Losing social connection; - Self-sufficiency or collaboration; 	<p>(3) between confidence and precarity</p>