

## Feelings Matter: How Curatorial Practice can be Informed by Insights on the Dynamics of Artists' Emotional Experiences

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**Abstract:** *This article uses evidence from six visual artists' own accounts of their artistic processes, in order tentatively to propose that there may be a commonality of emotional experience when it comes to producing artistic work. Through qualitative analysis we generated six categories of feelings that artists appeared to experience as they worked through the artistic cycle. This paper names and categorises the articulated feelings that appeared common to the artists. For each individual artist, we were able to identify feelings of engagement, disengagement, fear, a sense of constriction, freedom and relief. The emotional experiences associated with producing artistic work have been underexplored in the literature to date and we argue that knowledge about common feelings associated with producing artwork could be extremely useful, both for artists themselves and for curators. By recognising and naming feelings associated with different stages of the artistic process, both artists and curators might be more self-aware and facilitators or artistic mentors, including curators, might be more equipped to normalise the 'artistic struggle', to anticipate moments of motivation and to encourage persistence in the face of perceived obstacles. The implications of these findings for contemporary curatorial practice are explored.*

**Keywords:** Artistic process, feelings and emotions, contemporary curatorial practice, arts management, museum and gallery studies

*In recognising that there are feelings, both positive and negative, characteristic of different stages of making a new artwork, we can allow for a deeper appreciation of artistic process, and help anticipate the ups and downs of artists' struggles and triumphs as they work towards an often very challenging set of goals.*

### Introduction

This paper examines an aspect of the artistic process that is often talked about, but rarely subjected to empirical analysis, i.e. the feelings or emotions associated with undertaking the artistic cycle. Our findings show that feelings seem to emerge as an inherent part of the process involved in making a new artwork, and were described articulately by the practicing artists in our study.

We discuss and present this previously under-investigated aspect of the artistic cycle, drawing from, documenting and categorising data collected from artists and its analysis. We argue that this aspect of the artistic cycle is important; it seems significant to artists, given how frequently they described and assessed these feelings, and it is potentially useful both to artists themselves and to the curators and arts managers who facilitate the completion and presentation of their work. For the purposes of this study, we define the curating of contemporary art as involving, but not limited to the process of working with an artist to produce and present a new artwork. Knowledge about how artists feel as they make work, and what they may be likely to feel at different stages in the artistic process could, we argue, increase an understanding of that process and the potential for developing and enhancing it.

### A brief review of the literature

This study is informed by an interdisciplinary, empirical approach, drawing from the fields of curatorial practice, arts management, psychology and creativity. This offers an alternative means of approaching the data from philosophy, or art history, both often utilised in contemporary curatorial practice. An examination of the literature shows that artistic process is little examined and that the existing information remains largely unapplied to curatorial practice.

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### Arts management and curatorial practice

There has been an increased call for a reflective approach to arts management practice, internationally DeVereaux (2009) and in Ireland, Cooke et al. (2013) and Benson (2013). Marincola (2006) has argued that establishing quality in relation to the curatorial role and exhibition making practice has become a subject for discussion. Selected literature in curatorial practice, for example, in Hopps (in Obrist, 1996, p.101), Tucker (2001, p.171) and Bos (2001, p.33) describe the importance of understanding artists, of interacting with them and of respecting their processes in order for curators to fulfil their roles effectively. However, the artistic process remains poorly empirically understood.

Mumford (2003, p.114) and Sternberg and Lubart (1999, p.3), recommend increasing our understanding of creativity in order to identify techniques and strategies to support its enhancement. This consideration informed our examination of the feelings associated with the artistic process and the implications and recommendations for curatorial practice based on this study are structured accordingly.

### Feelings and emotions

Csikszentmihalyi offers a significant platform of investigation, which informs this study. He uniquely began his research work with a pioneering interest in the artistic process, moved into studying engagement and disengagement and has also investigated creativity. Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) main discovery was to define abstractly a state that was based on autotelic experience, experience that was intrinsically rewarding. Csikszentmihalyi named the state from some of the words of the participants, that of 'flow' (p.36). Csikszentmihalyi identified various features that encourage flow. One of the characteristics of his model is that flow is located between boredom and anxiety, 'when opportunities for action are in balance with the actor's skills' (p.49).

We also draw in this paper on understandings of feelings and emotions, as described by Dirkx (2001, 2006), who uses as a framework Jungian and post-Jungian theory, seeking self-knowledge, exploration and progression. Crucially, this approach is understood as a means of offering enhanced conscious awareness, through the recognition and understanding of experience and by elaborating on this experience and the balancing of both individual and common aspects. Many studies have suggested that emotions play an important role in creative behaviour. Emotional abilities, or an individual's capacity to notice, understand and marshal emotions (often referred to as 'emotional intelligence') have often been cited as in some way related to creativity. Emotional intelligence can mean that someone is more aware of and in touch with their emotional states, make links between those states and their performance outcomes, and use that knowledge to manage their creative performance more effectively (Palfai and Salovey, 1993; Isen, 1999).

### Artistic process

A focused examination of the literature within the field of creativity research identified a number of studies of artistic process and confirmed that there is a scarcity of empirical data and analysis of the feelings associated with the artistic cycle.

Various methodological approaches to examining the artistic process have been undertaken. One of the earliest studies, undertaken by Patrick (1937), investigated creative thought during sketching and focused mainly on detailed statistical analysis. More recently, Sapp (1992) carried out a qualitative, informal study, which identified and elaborated on the 'Point of Creative

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Frustration'. Cawelti, Rappaport and Wood (1992) chose Interpretive Structural Modeling and Nominal Group Technique to develop three alternative analytical models of artistic creativity. Mace (1997) took a grounded approach and her main analysis concentrates on problem finding and problem solving.

We examined and analysed from these studies the few findings and assertions relating to the feelings associated with the artistic cycle. In many cases the available material is two to three sentences presented in the context of a larger study, with a different thematic focus.

A common theme in all of these studies is that participating in the artistic process is characterised by sometimes intensive feelings; Patrick concluded from a four-fifths statistical association with 'an emotional state' during illumination that 'an artist is often emotionally stirred up...but it is not necessary or essential that he be so' (Patrick, 1937, p.54). Sapp (1992, p.21) centralised the 'Point of Creative Frustration' as a key feature of a model, which included denial and new growth. Cawelti et al. (1992) distinguished forty-three elements, a selection of which we identified as associated with feelings of failure and engagement. For example, those related to failure included elements numbers 15 and 33, (e.g., 'risking failure and starting over' [Cawelti et al., 1992, p.86]), and those related to engagement, numbers 4, 31, and numbers 37, 39 and 39 (e.g., 'feeling shock of leaving deeply altered state of consciousness' [Cawelti et al., 1992, p.85-86]). Mace (1997, p.274) alluded briefly to some of the feelings involved with undertaking the artistic cycle and identified artists' primary interest and enthusiasm for the process of experimentation, as opposed to the completed artwork.

From this study of the literature a highly incomplete impression of tensions and polarities between engagement and frustrations became apparent. In our study, by taking a grounded approach, a number of common feelings emerged from the data. The artists' descriptions and candid assertions around some aspects of the experiences associated with undertaking the artistic cycle demonstrated an emotional articulacy, indicating high levels of self-awareness among these artists.

### Research Methodology

Our research study was prompted by curiosity regarding the activities of artists as they produced new artworks for exhibition. This was informed by the lead author's experiences as a researcher situated in a contemporary art gallery, which focused on producing exhibitions of new artwork. The study was driven by the recognition that the artistic process that leads to the production of an artwork often remains unobserved and uninterrogated.

Informed by the literature we selected a qualitative exploratory approach. The lead author curated an exhibition, as a means of providing a real world context from which to gather data and analyse artists' experiences as they made a new artwork. Crucially the research process was informed by the insights associated with undertaking the normal activities necessary to ensure the success of the exhibition and its delivery to the deadline of the opening. We recognised the limits of objectivity in this context, and addressed this by ensuring in cross-case analysis that data was replicated across several studies, before findings and conclusions were drawn.

The artists' brief was to make a new artwork that reflected in some way on the permanent collection at the gallery for an exhibition, *Fresh: re-imagining the collection*, at Limerick City Gallery of Art, Ireland, in 2006. It took approximately eighteen months from the initial application for funding to the presentation of the exhibition.

The lead author devised the brief for the exhibition, supported the artists as they progressed

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their new artworks and co-ordinated the other aspects of the exhibition. She recorded and transcribed descriptions of the artists' experiences through in-depth interview.

Glaser and Strauss (1967, p.66) emphasise the importance of selecting an appropriate method of data collection based on the type of information required from the study. In-depth interviewing is a technique that centralises the experiences and knowledge of the participants, a research conversation to record information. This information is informed by both participants in the interview and is specific to a particular time, as experiences and understandings may change. Charmaz (2002, p.676) has described the aim of the in-depth interview as providing a deep and significant understanding of the participants' experiences. The in-depth interview is particularly suited for use with grounded theory analysis, which emphasises continual analysis to assist in informing interview questions throughout a research project.

The artists made their artworks for the exhibition as normal and when a convenient opportunity arose in the co-ordination process, perhaps after a meeting, an interview would take place. Interviews took between approximately twenty minutes and an hour. The interviewing process was informed by knowledge of co-ordinating the exhibition. During the interviews, descriptions of key events and processes were gathered, to find out what the artists were doing and thinking about, while preparing and making their new artwork.

The lead author used theoretical sampling, a grounded theory technique defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990, p.201), Glaser and Strauss (1967, p.45) and Charmaz (2002, p.689) as a means of focusing data collection. Theoretical sampling involves selecting groups or individuals to interview next who appear likely to provide insights into emergent themes. There were particular benefits in the methodology of the study, as while the artists were working on the same broad brief towards the same end date, they were often at different stages in the process and this allowed for comparison in accounts.

Artists Amanda Coogan, Sam Ely and Lynn Harris, Alan Magee, Linda Molenaar, Melanie O'Rourke, and Alan Phelan contributed a total of nineteen in-depth interviews during the process. Each artist contributed a minimum of two interviews of varying lengths between October 2005 and June 2006, when the exhibition opened.

All of the artists participating had a third level qualification in Fine Art or a cognate discipline. At least five of the artists had, or were undertaking a postgraduate qualification. Many were teaching as visiting lecturers in art colleges around Ireland and internationally. Most had exhibited their work in at least one solo exhibition and received bursaries or grants from the Arts Council, or from Culture Ireland, or from equivalent international funding agencies. There was a range of experience, from emergent to established practitioners, working in a variety of media including installation, performance, intervention, sculpture and print-making.

While there are plenty of biographical accounts by artists, the gathering and analysing of data collected from a number of artists during the process of working towards the same group exhibition, enabled the generation of a comparable account of common feelings associated with their artistic processes. In the studies discussed, Mace (1997) also utilised a grounded approach, but uniquely our study focuses on artists working towards the same exhibition.

Artists' emotional articulacy was revealed through the in-depth interviewing process, which recorded emotions of different kinds and levels of intensity. These in-depth interviews did not ask specifically about the artists' feelings, but about describing what was important to them, or what was happening at the time. Artists spontaneously described the feelings and emotions associated with making an artwork when asked to talk about the general processes involved.

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Following the completion of the exhibition, the data was further analysed through individual case studies, followed by detailed interpretation through cross-case analysis. From this, a fine-grained model of artistic process was initiated, one category of which captured the self-reported feelings associated with the artistic cycle. Six intense clearly articulated feelings were identified as an inherent part of the artists' experiences of working through the rewards and frustrations of the artistic cycle.

Our research study had the methodological advantage of tracking artists as they each worked towards a single project, allowing for a greater level of comparison than the previous studies discussed in the literature review. As the artists explained their activities, interests and priorities, a number of recurrent vivid descriptions of emotions and feelings emerged. By analysing the articulated feelings it was possible to identify overarching categories. This is a tentative mapping, which does not intend to be conclusive, but which offers a means to support further exploration.

**Findings**

The analytical part of this study involved classifying artists' expressed feelings into overarching categories. Figure 1 presents six categories of emotion identified through the analysis of artists' interview transcripts. These are: engagement, disengagement, fear, constriction, freedom and relief. These can be further extrapolated into three clusters of emotional themes: participative emotional states, liberated (positive emotional states) and tense (negative emotional states). From the analysis and interpretation of the data it seems likely that all of these feelings were a normal aspect of involvement in the artistic cycle.

Artists' accounts of their processes referred variously to intense satisfaction (usually associated with some of the aesthetic, or tactile aspects of art making), deep frustration (often related to necessary repetition, or some associated sense of tedium), a fear of loss of control or command over the work, feelings of constraint and entrapment, but also feelings of freedom and liberation. These experiences appeared so frequently and were so generally shared, that it seems important, perhaps fundamental, to define such emotions as key components of the artists' experiences as they made a new artwork, at least among the sample of artists who participated in this study.

**Figure 1: Summary of the emotions**

Feelings			
Participative	1	<b>Engagement</b>	The artists appeared to experience a totality of absorption and concentration.
	2	<b>Disengagement as indifference</b>	Disengagement could be experienced as indifference, or an inability to respond.
Tense	3	<b>Fear</b>	The artist could be afraid the final artwork was going to be dreadful, afraid of an unknown disaster, afraid that no clarity would emerge from the cycle; that they would remain in the same point trapped forever, afraid that this time they would be unable to finish the artwork and that they would fail.
	4	<b>Constriction</b>	Some of the artists described time as a yawning eternity, in which they were threatened, frustrated and deprived.
Liberated	5	<b>Freedom</b>	Some of the artists described rare, vivid experiences of freedom.
	6	<b>Relief</b>	The artists were relieved once the artwork was installed in the gallery. There was a sense of release.

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## **Participative: feelings of engagement and disengagement**

### **Engagement**

All the artists in the study talked about an intense interest and absorption in their work at various times during the process. While the source of the draw towards immersion may have been different in each case and at various times (for Coogan and Harris, it was articulated as an intense awareness of shape and colour, for O'Rourke, it was described as a profound appreciation of particular materials), there appeared to be a common sensitisation to the fundamental elements of their art, a fascination and curiosity, which supported a self-sustaining engagement.

### **Aesthetic appreciation and materials**

The artists often displayed an intense appreciation of elements of their practices, sometimes in the visual appearance of resources, at other times in the use of specialist materials. A strong sense of satisfaction with colour and composition is demonstrated as Coogan explains her appreciation of the visual diversity from the filmed footage that she used:

You know there's lots of glorious variations in body shapes in the piece [...] the sensuality of people's hair flinging around, that [...] gorgeous celebration of legs kicking in the air [...] (7 June 2006).

And Harris admires the posters, which originated from a diversity of designers and cultures: 'Really interesting aesthetic to work with' (10 April 2006). O'Rourke expresses a fascination with the tactile surface of the canvas that she would oil paint onto: 'I've just gone straight back to canvas first, because I miss canvas [...] I'm really enjoying the canvas' (4 March 2006).

### **Narratives**

Some of the artists located narratives, which they incorporated into the development of their artworks. Molenaar often uses cultural references, in this case focusing on those which featured swans, (The Children of Lir and Hans Christen Anderson), and she explains: 'But my original [...] inspiration comes from the legends and [...] from myths and stories [...] I love to combine those' (15 February 2006).

Phelan was fascinated by the information he researched about the portrait bust:

There is a great book about busts in NCAD: "Libraries are amongst the most important setting for busts in the 18c." [...] "A canon of worthiness repeated from library to library." (11 May 2006).

The artists appeared hyper-aware, or sensitised to the fundamental elements of their art as particular triggers for their engagement. It was as if they were poised in a position that generated their responsiveness to further, continued engagement, that engagement became self-sustaining. During the case studies they often intuitively seemed to select a path of immersion and exploration, which fed their progress.

### **Disengagement**

Both negative and positive disengagement featured in the data. Each of the artists experienced at least some feelings of disengagement. Negative disengagement was experienced as indifference, a type of blinker, or an inability to see, a set of experiences that resulted temporarily in a loss of responsiveness either in relation to the artwork, or to selecting an additional source to feed into the artwork.

It was noteworthy that disengagement was triggered by the circumstances and the context.

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Sometimes, engagement could rapidly switch to disengagement. There might be a particular trigger, when an activity that was previously enjoyed, suddenly, under slightly different circumstances became unsatisfying, or exasperating. Repetition of an activity, theme or approach was an underlying feature that appeared to instigate disengagement.

These examples were related to undertaking an activity that eventually became repetitive and potentially boring and seemed to be associated with indifference. In a particularly illustrative example, Harris describes her inability to recall the hundreds of posters that she had turned over the pages in order to film. Over an intensive weekend she processed thirteen drawers of posters and she explains that she could no longer remember them: 'I have amnesia I realise. [...] I don't remember that one, or that one, or that one' (10 April 2006).

Molenaar explicitly describes her choice of materials as a means of maintaining her engagement, as she makes objects that involve labour intensive, repetitive activities: 'I need to have respect for the material otherwise I will not have the patience' (15 February 2006).

The subtle factors that could influence an artist's move from immersion to indifference are illustrated by Phelan's comment describing his satisfaction on making multiple pine twig branches: 'very therapeutic, very fast to make' (20 January 2006), in contrast to his frustration at constructing five busts from papier-mâché: 'too much work, too much time' (2 June 2006).

In an ambiguous moment, in which both the celebration of progression and the realisation that this line of exploration is nearing a close, O'Rourke describes the beginnings of her need to undertake something fresh: 'I've spent two and a half years developing my practice to a stage [...] where it really can't go any further in my view' (14 October 2005).

The impression of bubbling enthusiasm and delight, which is demonstrated by the artists in the previous section on engagement, is in marked contrast to the frustration and boredom associated with feelings of disengagement. In the case of each of the artists we studied, it seems that making an artwork involves grappling with both.

### **Tense: feelings of fear and constriction**

Tense emotional states, feelings of fear and constriction were also associated with undertaking the artistic cycle. To participate in the artistic cycle it seemed necessary to tolerate these feelings at some level, as high aspirations drove the artists. There were memorable examples of fear and constriction in the data. These feelings could be unpleasant to experience, particularly feelings of constriction.

#### **Feelings of fear**

All of the artists made comments that implied that they experienced feelings of fear. Fear could be inspired by many different factors, depending on the artist and the artwork that they were trying to make. The artist could be afraid of failure (that the final artwork was going to be dreadful), afraid of an unknown disaster (that some unanticipated crisis or event would prevent them from completing), afraid that no clarity would emerge from the cycle (and that they would dwell in ambiguous territory unable to proceed with or finish their work); that they would remain in the same point trapped for ever.

One common fear seemed associated with a loss of control and chaos and consequently being unable to complete the artwork in a manner that preserved its integrity. To demonstrate, Coogan explains her concerns relating to the outcome of the performance and also her solution:

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What I was worried about is that it would become a very badly acted documentary and that is why I have bounced completely the other side, and [...] we are going aerobics... (19 April 2006).

Harris describes how some ideas never achieve a result, or even a level of consolidation: 'we can just talk about some stuff for ever and never pin it down' (10 April 2006). And Magee conveys a sense of dread at annihilation through display: 'if you don't put the right thing in there [...] it will destroy your work' (11 May 2006).

The overall impression was of anxieties related to being unable to impose an order, of unpredictability emerging and of failing to complete the artwork.

Much of the fear was moderately low-level minor fretting concerning deadlines and the meeting of high standards, and spurred the artists to anticipate and solve problems. The artists tended to appear concerned with order and control, while on other occasions displaying awareness that this could be counter-productive. In some cases, artists selected their own artistic constraints by defining the scope of their work, for example, Coogan decided to progress with group performance.

### Feelings of constriction

From the analysis of the data, the artists displayed occasional strong feelings of constriction. This was associated with a particular use of language and a description of time as yawning eternal purgatory, in which the artists were threatened, frustrated and deprived. The artists often described feelings of constriction in terms of an almost tangible physical pressure, or a sense of psychological heaviness.

Indifference was one of the factors that could eventually lead to feelings of constriction. The artists seemed to dread constriction and their descriptions often provide a sense of a perpetual, tedious cycle of repetition in which no progress is made.

Coogan describes not only a loss of progression, but also her awareness of this, that when filming she realises the necessity of being organised to capture the required footage early on: 'I have a very bad habit of going back and back and back, especially when [...] it is just me' (7 June 2006).

Ely and Harris express dismay at the potential repetition of undertaking the same thing as an approach to making a new artwork: 'Just do what we did before, again and again and again' (Harris) (10 April 2006).

O'Rourke's comment here relates to her reassessment of a technique, which she was confident in, but where her proficiency seems to have blurred into potential negativity: 'I really needed to shake up the languages I was using in my work. Painting, on its own, I'd done it for so long [...]' (13 June 2006). Phelan describes a feeling of having exhausted a theme of his biographical work: 'not to make my life's work about it, because I want to get onto more general topics in a way' (20 January 2006).

It was noteworthy that experience, or an over-engagement with a particular topic, or medium, or way of working, that had previously been positive, could become negative and worn out. An unchecked desire for perfection could endanger the entire process, or prevent completion of a particular artwork, or result in increasingly unproductive tinkering with minor changes. The artists sometimes seemed to balance precariously between proficiency and sureness, and depletion and over-use.

Coogan gives the impression of physical pressure, psychological heaviness and restriction, as she describes her previous experiences of organising filming and her eventual relief on the

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identification that it is normal practice to have a structure of assistance on set: 'That sometimes you feel an onus that you must be able to do everything and you must be able to take everything on your shoulders while you are running a shoot [...]' (7 June 2006).

O'Rourke explains a deliberate strategy to collect newspapers from local Irish newspapers weekly in London, to increase the quantity and variety of images that she used: 'what I am doing is loosening myself up [...] as my paintings have been so tight and so very designed and very meticulous' (4 March 2006).

### **Liberation: feelings of freedom and relief**

#### **Feelings of freedom**

An extended quantity of time invested in making an artwork seemed to be associated occasionally with feelings of freedom. Freedom was intensely positive, but infrequent and brief. Feelings of freedom were striking as the lead author collected and analysed the data, probably due to the artists' memorable descriptions of these. The selected examples suggest freedom and are often articulated by the artists using metaphors of momentum.

On occasion the artists displayed a focused concentration followed by a release. Coogan describes how practice from rehearsals and then several filmed takes supports increased confidence in the participant performers, as their recall of the individual moves deepens and develops, until: 'then they can let go of the choreography. So it was [...] trying to get them to [...] just go through the moves without worrying about it [...] just let it go and go with the flow' (7 June 2006).

Molenaar explains the balance between the story and the materials was different in working on *They will become flax...*, that as she centralises the painting as a way of advancing: 'I followed the feeling and let go of certain concepts, which was the most exciting part for me' (15 June 2006). O'Rourke indicates a dualism between the freedom of the poster format and the restrictions of working on canvas: 'it's a really exciting thing [...] the poster, it frees you a little bit from the confines of the frame of a canvas, [...] you know the preciousness of painting is [...] left by the side' (13 June 2006).

Consequently, feelings of freedom and relief can be clustered into the overarching category that we define as 'liberation'. These feelings seemed to take place in brief moments of reflection and self-awareness, at a distance from the cycle.

The above data seems to indicate a pattern of a discipline of undertaking work, followed by an intuitive increase in understanding and the identification of areas for progress, potentially in unexpected directions.

Some of the language that the artists used gave a physical impression of movement and space; floating, flying, landing, jumping, soaring through air or water. There seemed to be a commonly experienced wide-open sense of possibility and potential and the identification of a moment of significance, which had triggered this understanding of progress. To demonstrate, Coogan explains that the studio research she had previously undertaken, the opportunity of the commission and the resolution to challenge herself, prompted her decision to undertake a large-scale project: 'the liberty and safety I felt in this commission [...] that I felt that I could take a leap and not play safe' (7 June 2006).

Magee describes how, since receiving the invitation to participate in the exhibition, he has been excited about the many potential possibilities: 'my imagination has been flying' (22

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March 2006). And Molenaar talks about a rich set of options to explore, associated with swans and the format of the final artwork: 'that is for the future to find out where I land' (15 February 2006).

While Coogan describes retrospectively her feelings at the beginning of the project, Magee and Molenaar are speaking at this early point. There is a common sense of suspense, involving the rich unknowns and the freedom associated with the evolving artwork. This is perhaps based on their understandings of the opportunities and confidence in their own capabilities, that their efforts will be rewarded. The patterns involved in both sets of data, indicates cycles of intense engagement and feelings of freedom.

### Feelings of relief

Feelings of relief seemed to be associated with an element of retreat or distance from the work, and can be interpreted as a type of positive disengagement. Based on the examination of the data, we have focused on feelings of relief that the artists appeared to experience once the artwork was finished and installed in the gallery. Relief was connected to the sense of having succeeded, and to freedom from the intense engagement required when immersed in making the artwork.

The artists had completed a period of intense work and had successfully finished, or almost finished the artworks. It seemed likely that the usually positive assessment accompanied by feelings of relief, contributed to the identification of areas for exploration and progression, reflection and re-evaluation for the next artwork.

In contrast to other studies, a number of interviews were recorded shortly before the artists finished, and in some cases, after the exhibition opened. There was a difference between the sense of striving for excellence in the earlier interviews and associated anxieties and these positive assessments. It's clear that many of the artists see qualities in their work at this point, which they do not seem to have noticed, or recognised while they were working on it.

Coogan assesses one of the vignettes that composed the film and partly attributes its success to the performers involved: 'The skirt girls [...] were very experienced performers, [...] there is a lovely intensity [...] and straightforward connection with the camera' (7 June 2006).

Harris' comment the day after the exhibition opening demonstrates a positive assessment of the artwork, that the filmed element was successful: 'It is just beautiful' (16 June 2006).

Magee, as he installs, talks about the concrete cubes and his overall satisfaction with the installation: 'but it's working quite nicely, the chaotic swirls where the two mediums in the concrete separate or gel together, which matches the floor [...] I'm quite happy with it now' (10 June 2006).

Molenaar describes her contentment with the result of displaying some of the sweaters on the wall: 'I'm happy now there's some on the wall, but maybe in West Cork it will be too much' (15 June 2006). The exhibition was to travel and this seems to reawaken a sense of monitoring and correcting.

The artists' self-assessments of their artworks and the associated relief demonstrate a tension between balancing the positive and negative, to perhaps enable moving onto the next artwork. The casual assessments may form a component of a protective measure to avoid discouragement.

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## Discussion

The data and analysis from this fine-grained detailed study named and categorised various feelings associated with undertaking the artistic cycle. The artists describe in detail a rich variety of emotion, and they display emotional articulacy and awareness. This investigation suggested that experiencing the feelings of engagement, disengagement, fear, constraint, freedom and relief is a normal feature associated with the artistic process. The artists capably navigate through the challenges and tensions of the three clusters of emotional types, 'participative', 'tense' and 'liberated' and achieve the goal of completing a new artwork and progression to the next artwork.

This study took a grounded approach to explore an area that is little investigated. Using qualitative research methodologies, it documented and revealed feelings associated with making a new artwork, as described by artists. Based on empirical data and analysis, the research demonstrates an understanding that is not based on romantic or professional stereotypes of the artist. This has implications for curators of contemporary visual art, offering increased understandings from which to enhance their work.

Current research assessing and documenting feelings associated with the artistic cycle is sparse. By explicitly identifying feelings as a subject for examination and analysis, and by demonstrating the participative feelings of engagement and disengagement, the tense feelings of fear and constriction, the excitement of the experimental stage and the liberated feelings of freedom and relief our study supports and adds to the present rare evidence in relation to current understandings of the feelings and emotions involved in the artistic process.

Our study does reverberate with other work: the emotions the artists display relate to the possibility of actively managing Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) 'flow', between boredom and anxiety. Patrick's identification of an 'emotional state' (Patrick, 1937, p.54), is broadly consistent with our study, in which the artists experience feelings of engagement and also, sometimes, disengagement as indifference. Sapp's (1992) states of denial and new growth, that are presumably respectively unpleasant and pleasant to experience, chimes with the positive and negative states we identified. Mace (1997, p.274) recognises the tensions between an enjoyment with experimentation and the disengagement involved with completion.

Our study explores some of the emotional nuances of the artistic cycle that elaborates on and develops the findings of previous writers in this field. We do not draw any generalisations on the creative process beyond the sample studied, but note that there are patterns of experience in this data, that reflect literature on the creative process across a range of domains.

## Implications for arts management and curatorial practice

Several eminent curators have identified the requirement for an artist-focused ethos, in order for curators to fulfil their roles effectively. There is a shortfall in empirical information and understandings as to how artists work. Consequently, there is considerable potential for improving and enhancing curatorial and arts management practice by reflecting on empirical information and responding to it. This suggests the scope for the examination of possible approaches and techniques, which anticipate the feelings associated with the artistic process and which may increase the effectiveness of curators and arts managers in supporting artists.

There are potential benefits for curators derived from the insights presented in this study. This involves taking an artist-focused approach that is cognisant of context and encompasses reflection, rather than a prescriptive list of actions. Fostering good communications provides an enhanced understanding of the artist's particular experiences involved in making the artwork

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and provides the information to offer timely support.

Understanding that the artistic cycle involves particular dynamics of feelings, of engagement and disengagement suggests a versatile approach that includes discussing the challenges and the conflicts. Appreciating the normality of disengagement, of fatigue and perhaps a sense of occasional depletion and undertaking dialogue to identify techniques to address this may be appropriate. There are logistical factors that can be practically tackled through the allocation of resources; additional technical support and buying specific items.

Maintaining an awareness of engagement and encouraging artists to identify and embrace new challenges, to consciously pursue areas of focus and select new themes seems to generate an interest and a curiosity that sustains the entire process, both for each artwork and over the course of several cycles.

The impression gained from this research and from the literature is of a complex, multi-faceted practice in which many possible responses may be appropriate and many different potential roles are available. This suggests the possibility of an extended repertoire of professional identity for curators and arts managers. The individual practitioner may develop this according to experience, requirements and environment. We recognise that some of the ways in which curatorial roles may be extended, or changed as a result of the insights from this study may not be acceptable to all types of curators, or applicable to all circumstances.

For the curator adopting an artist-focused approach, this framework of feelings offers some possibilities for increasing awareness and understandings, and on occasion the potential means of navigating some of the challenges involved. In recognising that there are feelings, both positive and negative, characteristic of different stages of making a new artwork, we can allow for a deeper appreciation of artistic process, and help anticipate the ups and downs of artists' struggles and triumphs as they work towards an often very challenging set of goals. The responsibility for achieving the exhibition rests with the curator and supporting the production of new artwork may become a component of this aim. Sometimes there are tensions and ensuring completion becomes the main goal.

The identification of these feelings of disengagement, fear and constriction, normalises the context for the inevitable frustrations, dilemmas and tensions on both sides. Within this context therefore, this research can offer insight and a perspective of increased understanding to assess these feelings, and perhaps, to sometimes offer reassurance.

The artists displayed competence relating to emotional articulacy, an awareness of their feelings and emotions, an understanding of their experiences, and confidence in their validity. There seemed to be occasions when this consciousness was harnessed by the artists, as the feelings could be an indicator that progress was satisfactory and making an artwork was on schedule, or indeed that things had gone awry and that ameliorating action was required. That these were all experienced artists, is not an insignificant fact. Their emotional experiences, analysed in this way, can also provide useful emotional signposts for curators working with less experienced artists, providing a helpful framework for dialogue. Curatorial commitment to supporting the artistic cycle requires a number of approaches, which could include paying attention to emotional information: observing, listening, understanding and conversation.

Whether curators perceive that attending to the emotional aspect of artists' work is part of their job, may be a matter for debate, and may depend on the way in which curators have appropriated their own work-related identities. We argue that accommodating, recognising, understanding and being able to engage in dialogue about the emotional aspects of artistic work could substantially enhance curatorial impact and effectiveness. For some, this may

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already form a central part of how they work with artists, but for others this may also require a reconceptualisation of what it is that curators do, how they work and the kinds of dialogue they are prepared to engage in when it comes to facilitating the artists whose work they help to interpret and display.

### Conclusions and directions for further research

Feelings are a source of increased awareness in all manner of contexts, possibly particularly during the artistic process. There could be a much stronger role for emotion-related dialogue between the curator and the artist as a means of enhancing artistic process. Routinely acknowledging the emotional dimensions of artistic work, and understanding artistic concerns on a broader level could substantially enhance curators' capacities to work with artists and to be facilitators of their creativity.

For a curator, managing pressures on resources and often attempting to balance conflicting priorities, combined with an understanding of the artistic process and recognition of the feelings associated with it, this therefore offers a framework with which to explore appropriate effective support.

With this examination of the feelings comes an understanding that some aspects of these emotions may also be general features associated with the process, rather than related purely to any challenges that may have emerged. Knowing this offers the possibility of avoiding becoming unnecessarily sensitive, or anxious alongside an artist, or defensive in the face of a possible obstacle.

In conclusion, feelings are an important aspect of the artistic process. This study has offered a tentative structure for the development of a lexicon of the emotions, which are relevant to the artistic cycle. The emotional categories presented here offer a possible framework for further research. Such research could focus on testing whether the categories identified in this small-scale study are generalisable, and if so, to what extent. More complex and precise typologies might be uncovered and remain to be explored, but the empirical establishment of the emotional dynamics and contingencies of artistic processes could offer a useful tool both for artists and curators.

An in-depth understanding of the artistic cycle offers curators the potential to enhance the professional context of working with artists to support the production of new artworks. Certainly, the intuitive insights and knowledge from practice suggest the potential for a greater understanding through dialogue. The emotions and feelings associated with the artistic cycle offer an enhanced analysis and understanding of participating in that cycle and an insight into some of the motivations involved. It seems likely that the emotional articulacy demonstrated by the artists in this study supported their artistic process and that facilitating that self-reflexivity through dialogue in a coaching role may support aspects of this practice.

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