INFORMATION STUDIES DAYS 2024

How do visual artists generate ideas for their new artworks

Hille Ruotsalainen
University of Tampere
hille.ruotsalainen@tuni.fi
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2513-9223

Keywords: visual artists, work processes, ideation

1   Introduction

In this paper I explore ideation, perhaps the most interesting and captivating phenomenon within visual artists' work process. Previous research has examined the visual artists' work processes and the sources of information they utilize during these processes. However, it has not been investigated how the artists generate new ideas, or what the sources of these ideas are like.

RQ: What kind of sources of ideation do the visual artists utilize?

2   Literature review

2.1 On the concept of ideation

By ideation we mean the process of generating or forming ideas, often involving mental imagery or conceptualization of things not directly perceived through the senses (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). The etymology comes from Latin *idea*, a general or ideal form, type, or model, and from Greek *idein*, to see + *-ation* indicating a process or condition.

2.2 Earlier studies on the information sources utilized by visual artists' during ideation

Cobbledick (1996) highlighted the role of inspiration in the creative process. Hemmig (2009) expanded on this by identifying a comprehensive list of inspirational sources. Beaudoin and Brady (2011) focused on the use of images.

Mason and Robinson (2011) further explored the boundaries of "art information", while Robinson (2014) identified specific visual elements as key sources of inspiration. Cowan (2004) emphasized the importance of the work of art in progress.

Lee and Haddow (2017) examined the processes that integrate the finished work of art into the community. Gorichanaz (2019) added to this by identifying for ex. memories and the lived environment as significant sources of inspiration. Ruotsalainen (2012) identified several sources of inspiration utilized by the artists.

3   Research setting

3.1 Recruitment and participants

The research data was collected by interviewing 15 visual artists from Finland. Representatives of all art fields were chosen to be interviewed in equal numbers: painters, sculptors and graphic artists.

3.2 Data collection

The actual interviews were conducted in 2023 and 2024. The length of the interviews varied from 44 minutes to an hour and 45 minutes. All interviews were digitally recorded and saved as mp3 files.

4 Research method

4.1 Semi-structured interview

Semi-structured interviews are a widely utilized qualitative research method. According to Magaldi and Berler (2020), semi-structured interviews are characterized by their ability to follow topical trajectories as the conversation unfolds, allowing for discovery and exploration.

4.2 Coding and analysis

The analysis method was based on reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The interview data was reviewed multiple times. The data was coded according to recurring themes. Descriptions, or code labels, were applied. The final step of the analysis was to refine, define and label the themes.

5   Results

5.1 Sources of ideation

I identified four primary categories of ideation sources from this dataset.

5.1.1 Observations as a source of ideas

Within the first category, the starting point for an artist's ideation is **observing**.

Figure 1: Observations as a source of ideas.

The main sources were environment, society, art world, models, social media or information.

5.1.2 Self-created as a source of inspiration

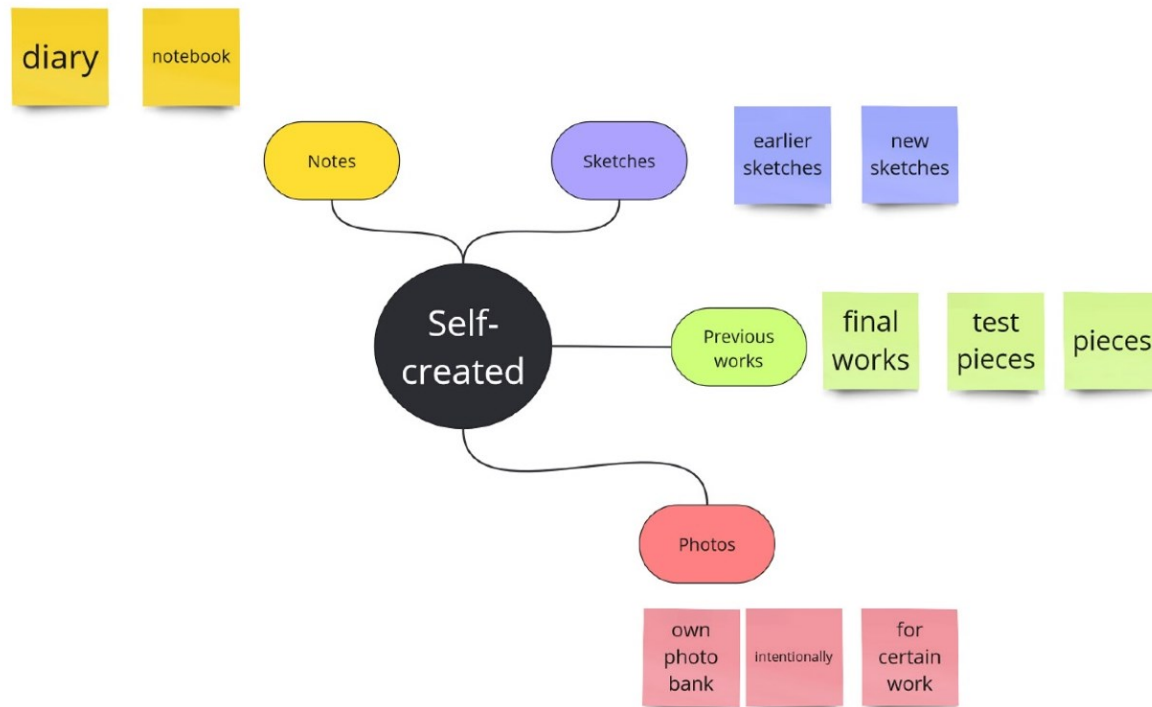Here, an artist draws inspiration **using any kind of self-created material**.

Figure 2: Self-created as a source of inspiration.

The main sources were previous works, sketches, notes, and photos.

5.1.3 Experimentation as a source of ideas

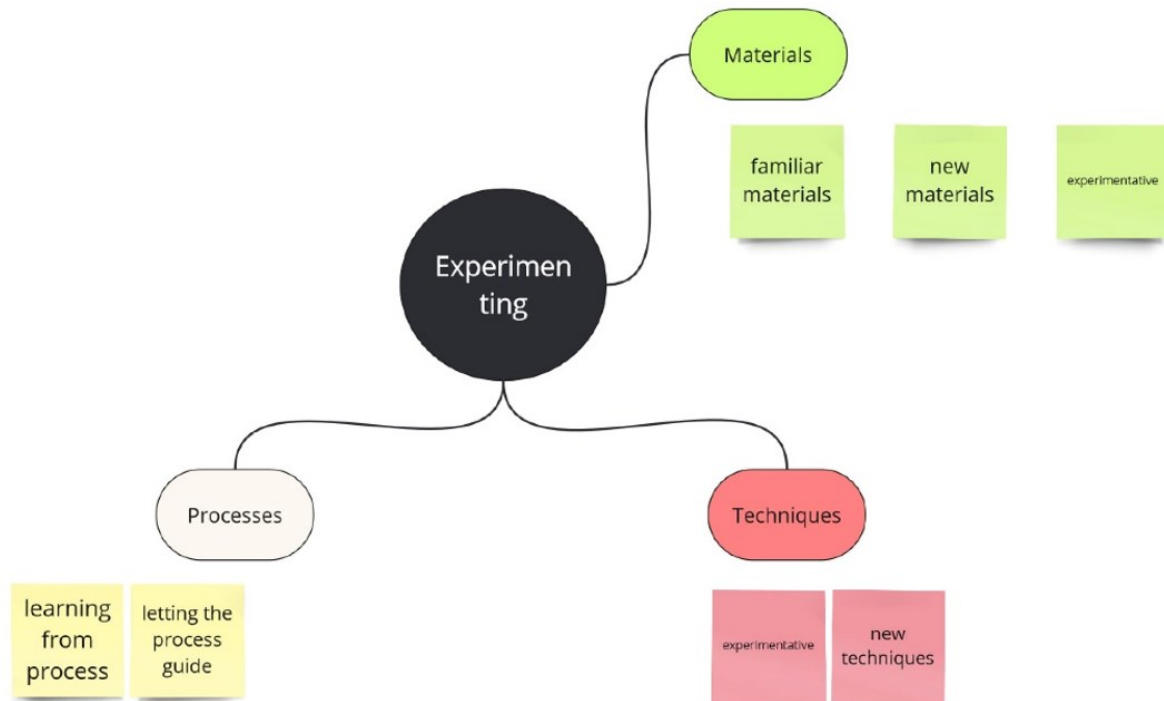When **experimenting**, the artist does not want to control the work process.

Figure 3: Experimentation as a source of ideas.

The main sources were materials, processes or techniques.

5.1.4 Self as a source of ideas

When using self as a source of ideas, the artist relies to own ideas or experiences.
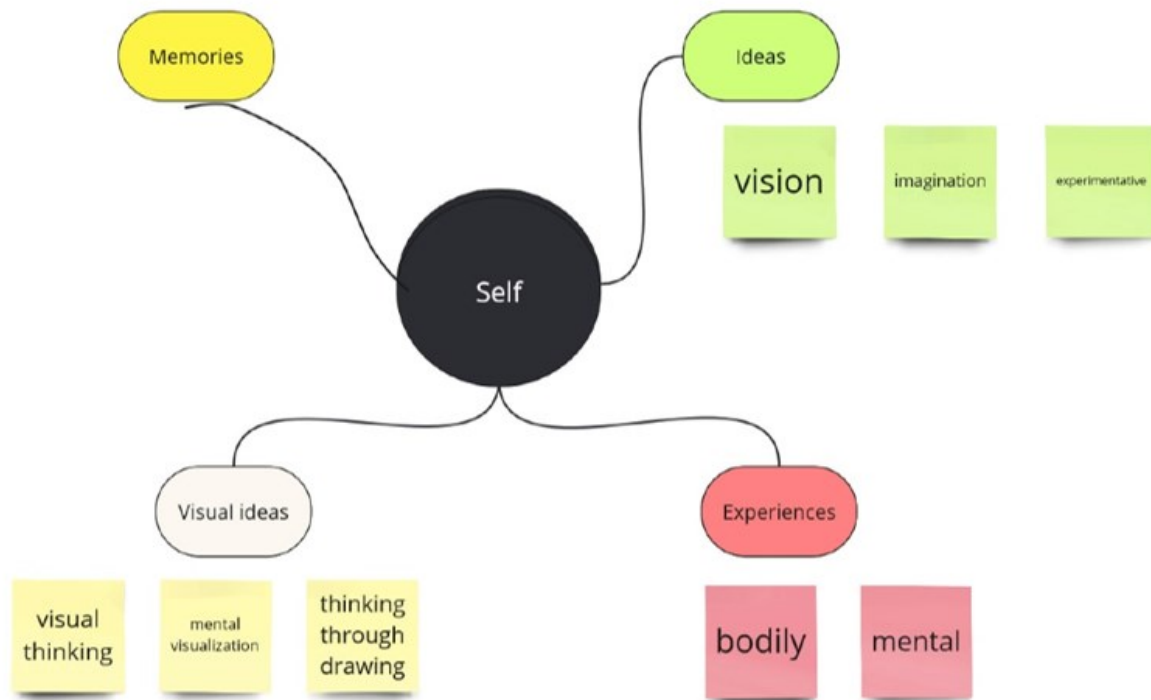
Figure 4: Self as a source of ideas.

The main sources were experiences, ideas, memories, and visual ideas.

6   Conclusion

I identified four primary categories of ideation sources from my dataset: observation, self-created materials, experimenting and self. This study confirms previous findings that visual artists utilize a wide variety of ideation sources. However, it contradicts earlier research that suggested the external world is a very important source of ideation for visual artists, and that other people play a significant role in this process.

For further research, I will suggest exploring the visual artists' work process stages, information sources utilized during their creative process stages, and the various types of information represented by these.

References

Beaudoin, J. E., & Brady, J. E. (2011). Finding Visual Information: A Study of Image Resources Used by Archaeologists, Architects, Art Historians, and Artists. *Art Documentation, 30*(2), 24–36. https://doi.org/10.1086/adx.30.2.41244062

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A Practical Guide*. SAGE Publications Ltd.

Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus (2020). Cambridge University Press.

Cobbledick, S. (1996). The Information-Seeking Behavior of Artists: Exploratory Interviews. *The Library Quarterly (Chicago), 66*(4), 343–372. https://doi.org/10.1086/602909

Cowan, S. (2004). Informing Visual Poetry: Information Needs and Sources of Artists. *Art Documentation, 23*(2), 14–20. https://doi.org/10.1086/adx.23.2.27949312

Gorichanaz, T. (2020). Understanding and Information in the Work of Visual Artists. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology, 71*(6), 685–695. https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.24286

Hemmig, W. (2009). An empirical study of the information-seeking behavior of practicing visual artists. *Journal of Documentation, 65*(4), 682–703. https://doi.org/10.1108/00220410910970302

Lee, H. L., & Haddow, G. (2017). *Artists' information seeking behaviour*. IFLA WLIC 2018. https://library.ifla.org/id/eprint/2158/1/162-lee-en.pdf

Magaldi, D., & Berler, M. (2020). Semi-structured Interviews. In *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences* (pp. 4825–4830). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-24612-3_857

Mason, H., & Robinson, L. (2011). The information-related behaviour of emerging artists and designers: Inspiration and guidance for new practitioners. *Journal of Documentation, 67*(1), 159–180. https://doi.org/10.1108/00220411111105498

Robinson, S. M. (2014). From hieroglyphs to hashtags: The information-seeking behaviors of contemporary Egyptian artists. *Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America, 33*(1). https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/675710

Ruotsalainen, H. (2012). Kuvataiteilijoiden tietokäyttäytyminen työprosessin aikana. *Informaatiotutkimus, 31*(2). https://journal.fi/inf/article/view/6750