

Understanding the barriers to creating artwork : An artist teacher action research project.

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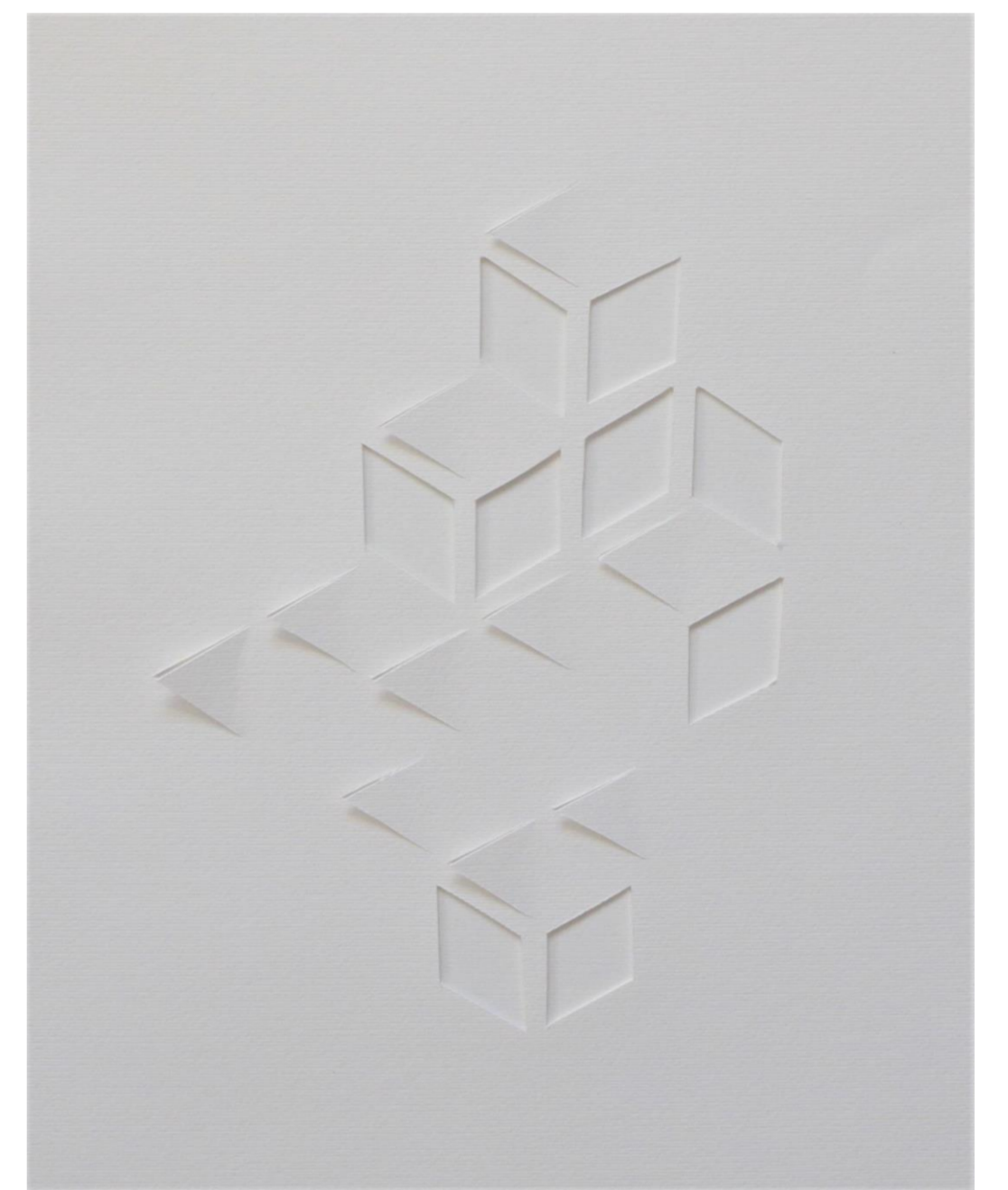
Introduction This study focuses on how personal **habit forming behaviours** can restrict an artist's productivity, the nature of their artwork, and how such behaviours might be challenged and overcome. The work takes as its subject my own experience as an **artist practitioner**, and attempts, through a **pilot study**, to identify and unpick the particular barriers that have prevented me from producing personal artwork. This exploration in turn has begun to reveal the contradictions between my own biographically constructed and lived identity, and what I have experienced as the false expectations in my art practice. The relevant **literature** for this research to this study focusses on **behavioural psychology** in general, and **identity theory** in relation to **habitual behaviours** and routines. **Grounded theory** is used as a means of collecting, coding and analysing written data generated using reflexive journals as part of an Action Research project. In this context, **Action Research** is research carried out in the course of an activity or occupation, typically in the field of education, to improve the methods and the approach of those involved.



Resistant Forces Image: John Blythe / Design:fizogdesign



After Lucio Morini, 2016, Claudia Panatti, Cartridge paper, 29.7 x 42cm



Personal **Artwork** created during this study was exhibited as part of an **MA in Education (Artist Teacher)** collective at **Ovada Gallery, Oxford**, January 2016.

During this **pilot study**, I recorded my actions, experiences and thoughts in an **autoethnographic** reflective journal over a 6 month period, writing regular, personal memos recording and reflecting on my experiences trying to initiate regular production of personal artwork. As the **sole researcher**, I used an **autoethnographic** first-person style of writing as data collection in my reflective journals as it contains elements of autobiography that integrated into both my personal and professional lives (Denshire, 2013; Ellis & Bochner, 2000); two areas that I was exploring as an artist teacher. I recorded my endeavours at producing artwork, including implementing timetables, types of artwork attempted, skills used and successes and failures experienced. I used **Grounded Theory** to analyse, collate and review my data using **inductive coding**. Inductive coding allowed me to group themes emerging from my data into sixteen initial core categories that included: competing priorities at home and work, identifying myself as an artist, and my perceived lack of practical art skills.

Data analysis suggested the following concepts. In order to produce personal artwork I needed an external incentive to produce artwork and in this study my external incentive was exhibiting my work as part of a group exhibition. My data also highlighted that an **artist identity** was not one that I identified with easily; it was not salient with my identity (Burke & Stets, 2009). My data revealed I had not implemented intentional change (Lyubomirsky et al. 2005), merely a short-term circumstantial change when producing artwork. Exhibiting work in a gallery was actioned by an external agent, and not by my personal desire and motivation, which led to my resistance to change (Jager, 2005). Intentional change when acknowledged and acted upon can lead to positive, **habit forming behaviour** as people *choose* to engage in new behaviour (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005).

Conclusions The field of this project, **human behaviour**, is a complex area to research as there are many variables to a personality, and too many intricacies in life to be noted and coded in a reflexive journal. **Grounded theory** is a labour intensive method of data collection and analysis. However, through coding and categorising Grounded theory provides insightful, unseen, viable data. It was difficult to keep a tight control of the evolution of codes, categories and sub-categories during the data analysis. This **action research** project was a pilot study that highlighted the reasons why I found it difficult to produce artwork, and allowed me to experiment with new ways of working and approaching my artwork, methodically and systematically. Further investigation is needed to understand my non-identification with an **artist identity**.

References

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