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*Precarious Careers:
A Longitudinal
Study with
Contemporary
Visual Artists
from Emerging
to Established
Career Stages*



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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the nature of artists' careers over eight years. It investigates artists' career paths including developments, highlights, challenges, and stasis over eight years. This is a longitudinal study that comprises two sets of interviews conducted with the same fifteen artists in 2013 and 2021. It analyses artists' reflections on their careers as emerging artists in 2013 and as established artists in 2021. It exposes how these artists' experience changes and shifts along their career paths, yet, how the one continuity throughout their careers is precarity. Together, this longitudinal study uncovers new knowledge on the nature of artists' careers by exposing how precarity is experienced over the course of their careers. This also develops existing discourse on precarious work and labour. Together, this expands understandings on 'precarity' in the creative industries by showing how it is experienced in artists' careers as something that is tangible and mental, how it is experienced across their careers, and how strategies are found to cope with this precarious career. Addressing this can shed new light on the nature of artists' careers and the nature of work in the creative industries today.

KEYWORDS: Artists, Careers, Precarity, Work, Creative Industries, Baltic States, Europe.

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the nature of artists' careers over eight years. It exposes the persistent precarities from emerging to established stages across artists' careers. While these artists' experience career developments and shifts, the one continuity throughout their careers is precarity. This longitudinal study investigates artists' career paths and examines how they withstand precarities over eight years of their career, drawing on two sets of interviews conducted with the same fifteen artists in 2013 and 2021. This study provides an analysis of artists' reflections on the starting point in their career in 2013 alongside their reflections mid-career in 2021. Together, this longitudinal study uncovers new knowledge on the nature of artists' careers and how precarity is experienced over the course of their careers.

This paper explores how precarities persist across artists' careers in order to develop existing understandings on precarity. The precarities of artists' work are generally understood and widely discussed in literature on the precarities of *work* in the creative industries (Bain & MacLean, 2013; Banks, Gill & Taylor, 2013; Lindström, 2016; Mahon et al., 2018; McRobbie, 2009). Precarious *work* is commonly conceptualized as being unpredictable, unstable and insecure (Michael, 2015; Bain & MacLean, 2013). This shows a need to explore *precarious careers* in order to expand the literature on precarious work (Serafini and Banks, 2020; Lingo & Tepper, 2012; Prosser 2016; Standing 2011), in order to show how professionals experience and cope with precarity throughout their careers. Moreover, while this is relevant to apply to the *careers* of artists, there is not yet much about artists within this field. Hence, this paper relates to progression through career stages and the (un)changing nature of careers over time (Sullivan, 1999; Shipper & Dillard, 2000; Pogson et al. 2003)

In addition to the more commonly understood precarities like financial struggles and self-sustained working style, there are other uncovered precarities that surface after a sustained amount of time in this lifestyle as well as strategies used to overcome precarities to survive this lifestyle long-term. Hence, in order to expand existing scholarship that covers only tangible precarities of work (Hewison 2016, Kalleberg 2009; Neilson & Rossiter 2005; Prosser 2016), this paper discusses both tangible and mental aspects of precarity. It discusses the practicalities of a career that includes unpredictable income, self-sustaining and do-it-yourself (DIY) style, and having to continuously find work. It also discusses the mental precarities of learning how to cope with this uncertain and self-sustained career. It is important to include both aspects to expand existing literature that often

considers the practical, tangible precarities of work (*ibid.*) but leaves out the mental precarities that are also a part of work in the creative industries.

Together, this paper expands this definition of precarity by exposing how artists are affected by precarities along their career, how precarities are both tangible and mental, and how strategies are used to cope with this type of precarious career. With this in mind, this paper asks: How do artists' careers change, develop or remain the same over the course of eight years from emerging to established stages? Addressing such a question is important to reveal new insight about the nature of artists' careers. This paper focuses on a group of artists who are originally from the Baltic States of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, but who are now living across Europe. For this group of artists, out-migration and regular mobilities are a necessity for getting international recognition and for progressing their career. These artists' opportunities to work across the European Union (EU) have changed dramatically since the end of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the EU-27 accession in 2004, which included Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.¹ Since then, the freedom of movement and right to work in any EU member-state makes the EU a conducive space for transnational practices.² Hence, these artists can use the nature of the EU in order to increase their opportunities and places to work. However, while the EU is a transnational space and a united 'European community', it is still in part dependent on decisions made by individual nation-states. In addition, there are political differences and economic disparities between Eastern and Western Europe that creates power relations and inequalities in funding and access to resources. EU member states have varying economic, political, and cultural circumstances, which creates necessity for relocation of artists from eastern Europe, and specifically the Baltic States. This means that precarities are influenced by multiple factors,

¹ An EU national or resident is entitled to work in any EU member-state without needing a work permit. They have the same rights as a national of that country with regards to access to employment, pay, and benefits. This makes it possible to work across the EU. This overarching integration, interconnection and free movement are due to the founding principles of the EU, which include the freedom of movement and the ability to work in any EU member state for EU citizens and residents. This is key for those who have transnational work practices. This is most clearly evident with passport- and border-free movement for EU citizens and residents within the Schengen Area, of which the Baltic States are a part. Additionally, there are also policies on cooperation between member states and for work that takes place across borders, such as the Interreg programme that encourages cross-cultural collaborations, travel and work. Transnational work practices across Europe have been more feasible for artists from Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia since the accession of the EU-27 countries in 2004, due to ease of travel and work, cheaper travel costs, and improved currency exchange rates. Hence, population movements across Europe have changed since the end of the Soviet Union (Ardittis 1994; King 2002; Rhode 1993).

² The most favorable space for artists is the EU because it is based on the principle of free movement. Since WWII, the EU has evolved from one of the most fragmented and divided areas in the world into the most integrated transnational space. Additionally, the EU has taken comprehensive measures to increase the mobility of artists by integrating this issue prominently into its cultural policy agenda, notably the framework of its Work Plan for Culture 2008–2010 and 2011–2014 (Lipphardt 2012: 112).

including geopolitics and geoeconomics, as well as the more personal physical and mental precarities they face in their careers.³

Many artists experience a 'glass ceiling' whilst working in the Baltic States, which makes it essential to work elsewhere in Europe.⁴ Hence, there is an added precariousness of geopolitics and geoeconomics for artists from Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Therefore, Europe's inequalities and the politics of the art world in terms of 'centers' and 'peripheries' can increase precarities for some artists from eastern Europe. This heightens financial precarities and means many artists feel pressure to hold other jobs at the start of their careers and leave their homeland for another place in Europe to work. This is a little-spoken-about precarity that intersects all aspects of their careers. This means that for these artists there are added geopolitical precarities in addition to the other precarities for artists. Hence, it is important to include these artists because it highlights different types of precarities and updates understandings on 'precarity' in careers in the creative industries.

METHOD

This is a longitudinal study including interviews with the same fifteen artists at emerging and established stages in their career. The interviews were carried out with contemporary visual artists in 2013 and in 2021. All fifteen artists originally come from the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, although, many are now living across Europe. They are all aged between 30-55 years old. The first interviews in 2013 covered topics of movement, home, how they started their career, their use of digital technologies for work across Europe, and their perspectives on the European art world. The same artists were interviewed again in 2021 in order to find out their

³ The political and economic situation in the EU also affects artists' work. In 2013, artists were affected by anti-immigration rhetoric and protectionist policies in western Europe that were at odds with nationals from Eastern Europe living in Western Europe as well as being at odds with workers undertaking transnational practices. The current political and economic situation in Europe, including Brexit and other far-right politics, go against transnational working practices and are slowly changing the open nature of the EU. Russia's aggression in Ukraine is (from a Western gaze) psychologically pushing this region more towards the periphery due to the proximity to the war zone. Russia's aggression in Ukraine has also made materials more expensive and has led to the cancellation of exhibitions in this region. Additionally, the covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequalities in funding and opportunities across Europe as well as pushing more practices and content to online.

⁴ This 'glass ceiling' is due to a lack of local art markets, few dealers buying art, and governments providing less funding in comparison to Western Europe. In the broader historical context, the Baltic States' art scenes had to be re-built during the 1990s due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, which means these art scenes have had relatively little time to develop as independent capitalist art scenes in comparison to established art scenes such as Paris or Vienna. This results in relatively less flows of 'art traffic' including art, curators, dealers coming into Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius art scenes. There are fewer collectors or dealers who are buying artwork, relatively fewer international curators and less funding available, government budgets are lower than in Western Europe, and the pricing of artwork is lower than in Western Europe. Money flows are also still not equal and are more concentrated in Western Europe.

career paths, shifts in their roles, career highlights, and new challenges. The second interviews allowed the artists to reflect on their career over the past 8 years since the previous interview as well as reflecting on their current career situation. This time duration was chosen to reflect the timeframe between emerging and established stages in their careers. The second interviews include reflection because the respondents knew that it was an '8 years on' interview.

The time that the second interviews were conducted was also an important moment of hiatus and reflection and a time of global change. This meant that they were more keen to reflect on their career. Furthermore, this sample have all remained artists or, at least, remained within the art field. This meant they were keen to be interviewed again. However, others who were interviewed 8 years ago have left the art world and did not want to be interviewed. In addition, others declined the second interview because they were too busy. This longitudinal approach was chosen to comprehensively assess artists' careers over a longer timeframe instead of at one moment. This paper draws on the experiences of 15 artists. It is about these individual artists and, therefore, cannot be generalized.

This paper highlights an important aspect of longitudinal research in that it can benefit participants. This method can instigate participant reflection. This fills a gap in the literature that includes only a small amount on the importance of participant reflection (Lewis et al., 2005; Fitt, 2018; Osmond & Darlington, 2005). Participant reflection on their careers is vital for career progression, so the interviews were useful for them too. This paper intervenes in literature on reflective interviews (Roulston, 2010; Legard et al., 2003; Doody & Noonan, 2013) as participants reflected on their careers in interviews. This literature needs to be applied to participants' reflections in interviews. Instead, most literature is about how the researcher can reflect upon interviews (Kvale, 2012) or reflect on the research process (Bourke, 2014). Hence, this paper fills a gap by showing how artists use the interviews to reflect on their career.

PRECARIOUS WORK

In the last few decades, 'precarity' has been increasingly understood as a central aspect of the nature of work (Hewison 2016, Kalleberg 2009; Neilson & Rossiter 2005; Prosser 2016; Standing 2011; Vosko 2010). Precarious work is generally defined as work that includes "uncertainty, instability, vulnerability, and insecurity" (Hewison 2016: 428). In particular, precarity has become associated with work in the creative industries (Wilson & Ebert, 2023; Morgan, Wood & Nelligan, 2013; Bain & McLean 2012; Banks, Gill & Taylor 2013;

Lindström 2016; Mahon et al., 2018). For instance, Oakley (2009) states that precarious work refers to the unpredictable, unstable, and insecure working conditions shared by many who are self-employed in the creative industries.

Artistic work is seen to rely on short-term, project-based work, including creative briefs or commissions and continuously moving onto the next project (Eikhof & Warhurst 2013, Mahon et al 2018). While pay and rewards can sometimes be high, more often they tend to be low, and are frequently irregular, intermittent or unevenly distributed (Lingo & Tepper, 2013). Artistic work is characterised by a high degree of ‘uncertainty’ (Pasquinelli & Sjöholm, 2015: 75). For instance, as Serafini and Banks (2020) state, precarity is acutely felt by artists because “the artist is an independent and self-realising figure”. As Michael (2015) argues, underemployment and continual income self-generation are central in the practices of artists’ everyday work, exposing how much resilience and adaptability are necessary for their work. Michael (2015) discusses the “precarious working conditions of unpredictable art markets, low incomes, and unregulated employment conditions[...]Precarity and precarious working are everyday features across the creative industries but are particularly evident in the everyday work of established artists.”

However, some studies argue that artists enjoy this type of work because they can be ‘passionate’ and ‘creative’ (Banks 2017; McRobbie 2016). Also, Florida (2002) argues that the positives for this type of work is that it includes flexible, freelance hours, itinerant and adaptable modes of working, control over creative outputs, flexible income levels, and freedom from career structures. Yet, the opposing argument is that these feelings of autonomy and independence are simply illusions (Menger, 1999) and the words ‘flexibility’ and ‘freedom’ are purposefully used to disguise the unstable nature of work in the creative industries.

Although precarity has always been a characteristic feature of artistic labour, some claim it is increasingly becoming much more widespread, embedded and ingrained in their work today (Banks, Gill & Taylor 2013; Lindstrom 2016; Throsby & Zednik 2010). McRobbie (2009) notices that creative professionals have much fewer entitlements and security than previous generations, due to the political and economic situation in Europe. Serafini and Banks (2020) argue that the current shifts in the European economy mean the ‘artistic career’ is now marked by an even greater sense of uncertainty, contingency and multiplicity than previously experienced in the mid-to-late twentieth century. Serafini and Banks (2020) argue these issues have become more pronounced across Europe and are affecting artists’ stability and ability to plan for the future. Lingo and Tepper (2012) also argue that artistic careers have become more unstable, with precarity now “requiring artists to shift

and adapt to diverse opportunities and to work in multiple roles". As well as economic and political factors, the covid-19 pandemic has also increased precarities, with recent work that explores increased precarity for artists during the covid-19 pandemic (Comunian & England, 2020; Caust, 2021; Howard, Bennet & Green, 2021).

RESULTS

PRECARITIES AS EMERGING ARTISTS

In 2013, precarities included financial insecurities, DIY working style, solitary working style, and multi-tasking. Additionally, there were geopolitical and geoeconomic issues that increased the precarities for these artists working in Western Europe, including having to leave their homeland to progress their career, less funding opportunities due to being from the Baltic States, and experiencing barriers with being accepted in new art scenes, and being labelled as 'post-soviet artists' when working in Western Europe.

Financial uncertainty was noticeable with selling artworks at exhibitions. There is pressure to sell during exhibition periods as this is the most likely time to sell. There is also pressure for artists to sell so that gallerists can pay for the costs associated with the exhibition. Laura Pold says "I want this to be sold" (Laura Pold, personal interview, 2013). However, there is no guarantee of sales even after six months of work for an exhibition. Laura Pold also shared the financial precarities around selling art at exhibitions because, even if an artwork is sold during an exhibition, 50% of the revenue goes to the gallery. As a result, Laura Pold says that she has to "leave my heart far away" when working out prices of her artworks (Laura Pold, personal interview, 2013). Laura Pold also mentioned buyers' way of buying artworks and how they will say "'well I think this is worth only so much' or 'I want this for my office and I only want to pay so much'", showing the artist's vulnerability around artwork sales (Laura Pold, personal interview, 2013).

There are other financial precarities in terms of funding and project work. Laura Pold said there was a fund for Eastern European artists in Vienna where she was living in 2013, though, it was not eligible for artists from Estonia (Laura Pold, personal interview, 2013). Laura Pold says "they [Austrians] think we are more Nordic" (Laura Pold, personal interview, 2013). This makes it precarious for artists from the Baltic States because there is not much available funding; they often do not qualify for funding from Western Europe and sometimes are not eligible for funding for artists from Eastern Europe or Scandinavia. Instead, Laura used *the Estonian Ministry of Culture* or *Estonian Cultural Endowment* to fund her project. However, as exhibition coordinator at *Tallinn Art Hall*

Tamara Luuk says, these grants “allow you to survive, not thrive” (Tamara Luuk, personal interview, 2013). Moreover, artists cannot repeatedly apply for this grant as each artist can only receive a certain amount of funding per year.

This links to another precarity concerning cultural politics in the Baltic States and how much value and support is placed on the culture sector. For Laura Pold (personal interview, 2021), she says the change in Estonian cultural politics has stayed same between 2013 and 2021: “in Estonian cultural politics, there’s a lot of discussion on the value of cultural work or art work, like artists work, but the outcomes are not visible. It ends up that they still cannot support much. 8 years ago the problem was the same.” Similarly, Tiina Soot says “the pragmatic reasons are most challenging [for surviving as an emerging artist]. It’s very difficult to make living from making art in Estonia. The general attitude towards contemporary art is also quite strongly negative” (Tiina Soot, personal interview, 2013). There were struggles and barriers specifically for Latvian artists trying to establish themselves in their career. Vineta Kaulaca says “there were a lot of funding issues but that didn’t stop me from becoming an artist[...]I have to admit that the peculiarities of economic development of my home country actually made me experience difficulties of solving funding issues as there were very limited possibilities for the state support for artists and the art market in Latvia was developing at its own pace” (Vineta Kaulaca, personal interview, 2013).

In 2013, many were struggling with the DIY and self-sustained work style. In 2013, a challenge was self-promotion on social media. This was a precarity they felt as emerging artists, as it meant they were multi-tasking, doing a job they were not trained in, and taking time away from producing artworks, which was important at the start of their career. As Zygimantas Augustinas says, “I don’t have enough time for painting as half my day is emailing” (Zygimantas Augustinas, personal interview, 2013). As Laura Pold says, “I need an assistant for this work[...]I can’t do it all by myself” (Laura Pold, personal interview, 2013).

In 2013, they were also doing other jobs to survive and make money. As Simona Zemaityte says, “it takes time to build. You have to support yourself somehow. I feel I am not yet established, but it’s not a hobby either. I have had a few shows of my work” (Simona Zemaityte, personal interview, 2013). Margus Tamm was a graphic designer in 2013; Margus says “I’m not sure about being professional artist. I’m quite sure that I’m professional graphic designer[...]I work full-time in office, so I have some financial independence but more limited time resource, so I adapt more project-based and temporary artistic practice” (Margus Tamm, personal interview, 2013). Also, Arnas Anskaitis was an architect and Zygimantas Augustinas was a designer.

This also affected their feeling of whether they were 'professional artists'. In 2013, these artists were questioning if they are professional yet or not. Kaido Ole shared about the long journey to become professional when he started his career and the importance of recognition by galleries or institutions in feeling 'professional' and to gain this (self-proscribed) label: "It came slowly. At the beginning I just tried to survive. I had one good show – my graduation show. Then I showed in my first private gallery, my first exhibition, at Vaal Gallery. They asked me to come and show there" (Kaido Ole, personal interview, 2013). Zygimantas Augustinas also questioned if he was a professional artist saying "I never felt that I am a professional artist. I am still in doubt. After graduating academy I used to work as a designer and to paint only in the morning before going to job. My first sales, prizes and scholarships came about 10 to 12 years ago but I continued to work as a designer till 2006[...]Only in 2009 the first signs of professional life appeared and that feeling grows every year" (Žygimantas Augustinas, personal interview, 2013).

PERSISTENT PRECARITIES ACROSS ARTISTS' CAREERS

The artists refer to their career developments and milestones over the past eight years. These career developments and milestones have culminated in their transition from emerging to established artists. They talk about important 'change moments' or 'career highlights'. For example, Merike Estna talks about one landmark as "having the first institutional show in 2014" (Merika Estna, personal interview, 2021). She notes the difference from the previous stage in her career that was characterized by "much smaller projects" (Merika Estna, personal interview, 2021). This chapter in her career, since 2014, has also been characterized by gallery representation and gallery representation. Kristi Kongi also says about change years and career highlights: "8 years [since last interview] is a long time and things are changing a lot[...]2014 was a change year for me, I participated in a huge show[...]I made big installations for exhibitions[...]the Kohler Prize exhibition in 2016, that was one of my highlights" (Kristi Kongi, personal interview, 2021).

Some artists say the most important shift in their career has been gaining gallery representation. This reduced their precarious working conditions as gallery representatives are responsible for their promotion and representation as well as more opportunities to participate in art fairs and to sell artwork. This gives the artists more work security, sense of professionalism, and less multi-tasking. They state this is a big change in their careers and a lessening of vulnerability when comparing and reflecting on the chaotic stage in their careers as emerging artists as, in 2013, a lot of their work was about multi-tasking and self-promotion. Today, galleries are responsible for promotion and

international exposure. Subsequently, some artists say that, today, they feel less pressure because they do not deal with social media. For example, Jaanus Saama says “one of biggest changes [over the past 8 years] is that I started to work with a gallery. Before this I didn’t sell my artworks. This wasn’t how I earned my money. But since 2014 with the gallery my artworks take part regularly in art fairs[...]all sales go through my gallery, who knows a lot more details about taxes and so on” (Jaanus Saama, personal interview, 2021).

However, for some, giving up their stable job to go freelance has progressed their career from emerging to established. However, this switch to full-time means their careers are now more precarious and unstable. This is a paradox as success and career development comes with increased precarity. Kaido Ole says, “my biggest change happened when I quit my teaching job and a career as a professor to try the freelance life” (Kaido Ole, personal interview, 2021). A new challenge as a full-time, established artist is having too much work as there is no upper limit to the workload. This is a “paradox” as Edith Karlson says, as they are successful but many are now more stressed and have less time (Edith Karlson, personal interview, 2021). Edith Karlson says, “I’m basically like 24 hours busy all the time[...]I’m overbooked[...]there are too many things I have to do all the time[...]I don’t like it this way. I have to do, do, do, do, produce and produce” (Edith Karlson, personal interview, 2021). Kristi Kongi says “I have to be honest, for the past 8 years I have been constantly working and there has always been this date, the exhibition date” (Kristi Kongi, personal interview, 2021).

These artists still experience unpredictable pay even after career developments and milestones. Margus Tamm says “freelance creative workers are in especially vulnerable situation” (Margus Tamm, personal interview, 2021). Going freelance increases precarities because there is little job security; as Tiina Soot says, “my worry today is about getting health, social, and unemployment insurance” (Tiina Soot, personal interview, 2021). Arnas Anskaitis mentions low pay and how this makes him consider whether other jobs would be more stable (Arnas Anskaitis, personal interview, 2021). However, he feels more precarious now because there is no other option. As Arnas Anskaitis says “it’s very hard [to survive]. I heard visual artists are the poorest but this is my way to live. I can’t clean my shelf, I have my shelf and I can’t clean it and leave with blank paper” (Arnas Anskaitis, personal interview, 2021). Kristi Kongi calls her work “mission work” and mentions the unpredictable pay that is up-and-down and never the same (Kristi Kongi, personal interview, 2021). Kristi Kongi also says how she was warned away from becoming freelance because she would always be poor; Kristi says “it’s really mission work. I need to survive so I need different projects, I need different system to survive,

so I think I'm quite used to working like that, there are times where there is no money and there are times where there is more money than I want, but overall quite equal. Older generation artists were warning me when I went freelance, you always have to collect money, you have to have little money always" (Kristi Kongi, personal interview, 2021). For Jaanus Saama, who represented Estonia at the Venice Biennial in 2014, also still has uneven and unpredictable pay: "some years I don't sell anything and some years I sell more, so I can't expect this" (Jaanus Saama, personal interview, 2021). The precarity is that, even now as established artists, some do not earn much money but, more importantly, the pay is unpredictable throughout their careers.

MENTAL PRECARITIES AS ESTABLISHED ARTISTS

There are two main mental precarities these artists face as established artists:

1. Lack of energy and enthusiasm to keep going and to keep being creative in self-sustained work.
2. Becoming an aging artist and not part of the new generation anymore.

These artists are struggling with whether they should continue in this career, even though they are now 'established'. By contrast, eight years ago, they were questioning how they should become a 'professional artist' and make a name for themselves; eight years on, they are still struggling with whether they are a 'professional artist'. Laura Pold says "you have to keep on going for decades without feeling much of a change[...]I'm always struggling with proving that I am an artist" (Laura Pold, personal interview, 2021). As Kiwa Noid says, "I keep updating my identity as an artist. I am questioning it every day" (Kiwa Noid, personal interview, 2021). Similarly, Eva Vevere says "to keep going and have projects and exhibitions you need to either keep the relations alive or you have to find new things you want to do, new partners, and every year I pose the question 'what do I want to do now'" (Eva Vevere, personal interview, 2021). As Arnas Anskaitis says, "I'm still figuring out what to do next" (Arnas Anskaitis, personal interview, 2021).

They say a new mental challenge is becoming an aging artist. As Eva Vevere says, "what to do in your art career when you're aging, and how do you handle these things, when you're not the young and promising anymore[...]I see the new generation coming in and doing the same things" (Eva Vevere, personal interview, 2021). Laura Pold says "I didn't realise that I'm not a super young artist anymore. But today they published the Estonian contemporary art center publication, an article about young artists and, oh, I was thinking who are these young artists, I didn't know any of them. And then I realized I'm not that young artist anymore" (Laura Pold, personal interview, 2021).

Some now feel tired and lacking energy to keep on making work and jobs for themselves. They have been doing this self-sustained work for so long that now it is more difficult to find energy to start new project after one finishes. Four artists mentioned lack of energy and enthusiasm to find ideas for new projects. As Merike Estna says, the new challenge at this stage of her career is “it’s harder to find enthusiasm and the new thing” (Merika Estna, personal interview, 2021).

LEARNING TO SURVIVE PRECARITY

There are four ways of surviving the precarity that these artists have learnt along their career and apply today:

1. being resourceful and working cheaply but still being productive and creative.
2. expanding to curator, writer, or publisher.
3. working in collaborations.
4. working with archives.

Six artists use the word “survive” to show how they (have to) find strategies to cope with the precarities. These artists must keep producing artwork using their creativity and continuously create new ideas for projects. Additionally, they also have to find creative ways to overcome precarious working conditions. Arnas Anskaitis says he finds ways of surviving by being clever with buying cheap materials and being resourceful. Kristi Kongi says you have to learn how to survive by learning how to buy materials cheaply and be resourceful. Kristi Kongi says this precarity has not changed or gone away even though she is an established artist, Kristi Kongi says “it hasn’t changed unfortunately. This feeling of you don’t know what will happen after six months or a year is quite common but I think this is how art life is” (Kristi, personal interview, 2021). Vytautas Virzbickas also says “my works are now bigger but I have to find a way to buy materials with little money[...]you have to find a way to live very cheaply but still be productive in the art world[...] I’m dreaming of getting rich someday, so its balancing between self-courage and productive creativity” (Vytautas Virzbickas, personal interview, 2021). They need courage to go through this precarious vulnerable career and have to learn how to survive in this lifestyle.

Five artists have started working in collaborations or artist duos in order to overcome struggles with finding new ideas and energy on their own and to overcome the precarity of solitary work. For instance, Kriss Salmanis says that recently “I have collaborated more” (Kriss Salmanis, personal interview,

2021). Liina Siib similarly says that “collaboration is a very important part” of her career now (Liina Siib, personal interview, 2021). As Kaido Ole says, “my last two exhibitions already were made together with German and Lithuanian artist and now it looks like following the same cooperation pattern” (Kaido Ole, personal interview, 2021). Merika Estna shares about how she now relishes collaborations at this stage in her career: “I have tried to make collaborations more recently, which is difficult but really excites me now. I can take a bit of distance and also open my mind to completely different and do something new” (Merika Estna, personal interview, 2021). Eva Vevere says “my latest thing is that I have a new collaboration. A duo with a Danish artist. For 3 years now[...] I like when my work is in some kind of dialogue. I like this creative sparring. So we have support and challenges” (Eva Vevere, personal interview, 2021). For Eva Vevere, “the collaboration network has broadened” over the past 8 years (Eva Vevere, personal interview, 2021).

Four artists have shifted to research and archival work because it answers their desire for longer projects. They now wish for longer projects so they have more time and less stressful deadlines. As Laura Pold says, “I’m considering bigger projects where there is more time” (Laura Pold, personal interview, 2021). Several artists have started using archives, combining production of new art and using existing archives. Liina Siib says she tries to include different points of view in her artworks and she wants to work with more context and discourse. As Zygimantas Augustinas says, “my works have changed a little bit. During past seven years I was focused on the relation between epistemology and visual material[...]The reason for these changes is that I am influenced by the concept of artistic research” (Zygimantas Augustinas, personal interview, 2021). As Arnas Anskaitis says, “I am now more focused on artistic research, especially the last 5 or 6 years” (Arnas Anskaitis, personal interview, 2021). For Jaanus Saama, it has become more sustainable to combine new artworks with research work and sourcing archives: “I’m more and more working with history and different museum collections. I then combine my work with older works from archives” (Jaanus Saama, personal interview, 2021). This is resourceful because it is less costly and more efficient than producing all entirely new artworks.

Some refer to shifts and expansion in their role, as with Kristi Kongi, Laura Pold, and Simona Zeimaityte, who started curating by inviting others to participate in shows. For example, Simona Zeimaityte has recently started “curating a few shows” (Simona Zeimaityte, personal interview, 2021). Laura Pold also “began in 2017 to invite people to show with me. Little step by step changing[...]before I would always wait for something to happen to me. So now I’ve been initiating things on my own[...]if you have a clear vision and

you know who would fit in this project, I guess now I have the knowledge to start things on my own as well” (Laura Pold, personal interview, 2021).

Others have also gone into different avenues of work or expanded their roles. As with Margus Tamm, “the last solo show was already five years ago and at the moment I have no further plans in this direction. Instead, I have become more involved as a cultural critic, contributing to numerous publications” (Margus Tamm, personal interview, 2021). Kiwa Noid has also expanded his roles to writer and publisher. Kiwa Noid talks about the past ten years with this as a focal point in his work: “In 2014 I founded Paranoia Publishing and have been mainly busy with this, so far over 50 books have been published. Collaborations with over 200 international artists” (Kiwa Noid, personal interview, 2021).

DISCUSSION

The main finding from both sets of interviews is about the persistence of precarities across these artists’ careers. While these artists have gone through career developments and milestones over 8 years, the persistent factor throughout their careers is precarity. The findings from the first set of interviews in 2013 highlight the precarities these artists were experiencing at the emerging stage of their career. These included working out how to go full-time, how to become a ‘professional artist’, how to get funding and earn enough money, and how to work in a DIY style. Many started part-time and had a stable job. However, this meant they also struggled with having to demarcate themselves as ‘professional artist’. The added precarity they faced from the beginning of their careers was the added geopolitics of coming from a ‘periphery’, where not a lot of money is put into the arts as compared to western Europe. This meant most migrated to another location in Europe, such as Vienna, Berlin, and Brussels, with more work opportunities. Yet, they still faced issues with not qualifying for funding.

Another main finding from the interviews is how precarity can be tangible and mental. There are tangible forms of precarity, such as lack of and unpredictable income. However, there are also mental precarities, such as becoming an aging artist, no longer being a part of the new generation of artists, and lacking energy to keep being creative and continuously coming up with ideas for new projects. Mid-career, these artists experience new challenges or new types of precarities that were not present as emerging artists. This includes dealing with being an aging artist and struggling to maintain energy. Today, some have become tired of the precariousness of extreme workload and unstable pay. There is a mental challenge of getting older and not being ‘cool’ anymore. Seeing the new generation is coming in and going through the same process as they did makes them more reflective of their own career

and what they have been through and how far they have come, yet, how they are still making the same mistakes and how their lifestyle is still as unsettled. Their mental precariousities are more pronounced now than in 2013 when they were fresh and excited as now they have withstood this lifestyle for 8 years and not much has changed in terms of stability. The past two-three years seems to have made these artists even more questioning about their career choice and the sustainability of this kind of career for their future. In fact, therefore, later on in their career arc they experience more types of precarity. This is in contrast to stable contract careers where mid-career is often associated with more stability and settledness.

They also struggle with always having to prove themselves because their work is self-made and self-sustaining. For instance, they must keep proving themselves as a 'professional artist'. The artist career includes mental precariousities because their work is largely self-made, in that it is all done and made by themselves. They are the ones who state themselves as 'artist' and then have to always prove to others this, as there is no-one or no big institution to demarcate them as 'professional artists'. In 2013, they struggled with not knowing if they were 'professional artists'. This was a more mental precarity, which they felt they were not because of this and because it is self-determined work. They are still experiencing this as established artists. They found it difficult to know if they were 'professional artist' in 2013 but this is still an issue; this is partly because there is no clear outside demarcation of being a 'professional artist'. This makes them feel unstable and unsettled in their career as there is no official to say they are professional. This shows a need for more standards for the artists' freelance career.

A third main finding is that these artists face new types of challenges in this stage of their career. As a result, these artists focus more on finding ways to cope with precariousities. They say openly how they need courage to go through this precarious, vulnerable career and they must learn how to survive. They must learn to cope mentally and practically with this kind of uncertainty. For example, career survival strategies include working in collaborations, starting longer research projects, expanding their roles, and being resourceful. Some work in collaborations to overcome financial insecurities, to cope better emotionally with solo work, to overcome unprotected DIY and multi-tasking working conditions. They form protective alliances by coming together and forming partnerships. Some try to resist the precarious project-after-project-based working style by doing longer art archive projects. Some have gone into new roles, like curator, to provide a bit more stability and provide another revenue stream. Moreover, going into other roles and expanding their roles allows them to take some control in their job by creating jobs for themselves.

CONCLUSION

This paper has analysed these artists' career developments and milestones over 8 years, which demarcate the transition between emerging to established stage in their career. Yet, this analysis has illuminated one consistency throughout their careers, which is persistent precarities. This was shown through this paper by looking at artists' reflections at the start of their career as well as at mid-career about career instability, freelance struggles, financial problems, self-sustained and DIY style. Together, this has revealed a lot of new knowledge about the nature of their careers. The artist profession is innately precarious because it is self-made and self-sustaining; this is not a new phenomenon. However, this paper has provided a more nuanced account of the nature of precarity across artists' careers. This highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of precarity in artists' careers. It has shown this by exposing the tangible aspects like being unstable in terms of income and having to continuously find work for themselves. In addition, this paper has found how artists' careers include mental precarities like having to always prove themselves as a 'professional artist' and dealing with uncertainty throughout their career.

This study has highlighted how success and career progression in fact means more instability. This is because these artists have to be freelance as a full-time artist with little job security. They face persistent issues of low and irregular pay and always having to find funding sources, and create their own work opportunities. Moreover, some have shifted back into more stable roles at the so-called 'established' stage in their career, such as publisher. This means that later in their career they (have to) go back into stable jobs again. Therefore, the career arc for some artists starts from having to be a part-time artist with a stable job, to then experiencing the most severe precarities and instabilities when they decide to go full-time. They are then the most 'successful' but this is the time of most unpredictability. After a period in these circumstances, they then start to shift in their roles in order to find more stability, as with becoming curator or publisher.

Overall, the paper has shown this is a precarious career because it is work that is self-made and self-determined. Moreover, they must keep on building their career by themselves throughout their lives. Hence, this career does not allow stasis nor stabilization; this means they always have to think about their next move and how to create their next opportunity. As a result, many still do not know where they are going or doing next month even though they are 'established' artists. This is important to consider for a better understanding of the artist's career, in terms of how they have to rely on their self-made network that is always needs effort to be sustained continuously throughout their career and this does not stop once they are established.

This longitudinal study has been important to show how these challenges and precarities are experienced across their careers, rather than only at the start. It has also shown how these artists have to continue to get work and make opportunities throughout their careers.

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