



The information needs and behaviours of creative artists: a meta-ethnography of research, 2019-24

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Abstract

Introduction. The literature of library and information sciences (LIS) is replete with research exploring the information behaviour and needs of representatives of or participants in specific scholarly, professional or *serious leisure* interest-related contexts. The body of research related to the information behaviour of those engaged in creative endeavours (visual and applied arts and design, the performing arts, creative writing, and music performance and composition) has not warranted similar work, perhaps due to its relatively smaller volume.

Method. This study uses a *meta-ethnographic* approach to analyse 23 studies of creative artists' information behaviour published between 2019 and 2024.

Analysis. This project assesses the information behaviour of individuals involved in creative activity with the goal of illumination and establishing commonalities, themes and differences among them.

Results. Creative artists' information behaviours share several common characteristics, some of which distinguish them from representatives of other fields.

Conclusion. This study presents an overview of creative artists' information behaviours and needs, providing a basis for further study and comparison to the information behaviours and needs of representatives of other fields, such as scientists and social scientists. This paper also offers suggestions for information professionals who wish to provide services to creative artists.

Introduction

In the years since Dervin and Nilan's 1986 *Annual review of information science and technology* (ARIST), 'Information needs and uses' sparked the 'user-centered turn' in information science (Talja and Hartel, 2007, unpagged), research exploring the information behaviour of members of groups sharing a common interest or goal has been a major focus of information science research. While it is perhaps less prominent than research about how information users behave 'in relation to places they encounter or technologies they use' (Julien, 2018, unpagged), collective-focused information behaviour research constitutes a significant subcategory of research devoted to information behaviour, as illustrated by Huvila and Gorichanaz's (2024) review of information behaviour research published between 2016 and 2022, which includes studies of such diverse groups as journalists, doctoral students, cancer patients, people with disabilities, and migrants and refugees (p. 218).

A significant subcategory of this type of research focuses on the information behaviour of specific scholarly, professional and serious-leisure related collectives. For some user groups, the information behaviour literature is sufficiently copious to support meta-analysis of several studies. For example, over the past five years, authors have published meta-analyses or systematic reviews of research related to the information behaviours of graduate business students (Vinyard et al., 2025), visual artists (Kolyvas and Kostagiolas, 2024) health care professionals (Tan et al., 2023), maritime students (Chlomoudis et al., 2022), student teachers (Dahlqvist, 2021) and female lawyers (Jamshed, 2020).

While less voluminous than the body of research regarding, for example, scientists' information behaviour, the number of studies exploring the question of how individuals involved in specific areas of creative work engage with information is growing. Researchers have investigated the information-related activities of composers and performing musicians, visual artists, applied artists and crafters, dancers and choreographers, actors and writers, but with two exceptions, visual artists (Kolyvas and Kostagiolas, 2024) and musicians/composers (Lavranos et al., 2016), not to the point of generating a body of literature sufficiently large to support a meta-analysis of the research projects' premises, designs and findings.

Utilising a *meta-ethnographic* approach to this meta-research project, this study represents an effort to interrogate the body of research addressing the information behaviour of individuals involved in creative activity (referred to interchangeably in this text as *artists*, *creative artists*, *individuals involved in creative activity* and *creatives*) with the goal of establishing possible commonalities, themes and differences among them and providing a basis for further comparison of creatives' information behaviour to those of other categories of individuals or work, such as scientists and social scientists.

Research questions

1. Considered collectively and comparatively, do findings generated by information behaviour-related studies of artists suggest any commonalities?
2. If so, do themes emerge that might enhance our understanding of the role of information in creative endeavours (and what are they)?
3. What, if any, implications might these have for information professionals' practice?

Meta-research as methodology

The collection of methodological approaches categorised as *meta-research* are concerned with aggregating, analysing and developing conclusions about a collection of individual studies that share a common element. Most frequently, meta-research projects focus on either (or both) of two elements: the research method employed or the subject of the project within a larger body of research. Meta-research can be conducted in any disciplinary tradition with epistemological and

ontological bases that are developed cumulatively rather than iteratively and can provide benefits for the epistemological and ontological health of a discipline. In his presidential address to the 1981 International Communication Association's membership, Everett M. Rogers encouraged his colleagues to employ meta-research, claiming that taking '*a bird's eye view*' of the design, results and conclusions from a range of studies addressing the same or similar topics can promote '*the synthesis of primary research results into more general conclusions at the theoretical level*,' contributing to a discipline's epistemological framework. (p. 6)

Meta-research, according to Rogers, provides '*the intellectual cement that glues a research discipline together, that helps it understand where it is going and what it is finding*' (Rogers, 1981, p. 6). Pushing beyond the boundaries of the bibliographical essay or literature review, meta-analysis can have the more immediate effect of illuminating common ground among existing studies on similar topics, as well as allowing a discipline to '*identify knowledge gaps and suggest directions for future research*' (Ren, 2008, pp. 2-3).

Several approaches to meta-research are employed in a variety of disciplines. Differences between their respective methodological frameworks vary from those that might be considered significant to more inconsequential variances. Meta-analysis is perhaps the most common approach and refers to the collection and highly structured review of the elements and conclusions of a large collection of studies with a common focus. Typically focused on quantitative measures, meta-analyses determine the extent of agreement between individual works' findings. The systematic review approach developed for seeking, aggregating and analysing health-related information is closely related to meta-analysis. Meta-synthesis, on the other hand, aggregates and analyses interpretive or qualitative research works. Developing grounded theory to '*explicate processes, which are comprised of concepts and the dynamic relationships among them*' is often a goal of meta-synthesis (Finfgeld-Connett, 2018, unpagged).

Several recent information behaviour-related studies have employed a meta-research approach. As the systematic review approach is deeply ingrained in health informatics, it is unsurprising that this field is home to many of these studies. Chang and Huang (2020) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of health informatics literature to determine common antecedents among those seeking health information. Hallyburton and Evarts (2012) reviewed five survey-based studies to identify explanations for discrepancies between health information search behaviour as displayed by men and women, collectively. Ankem's (2006) statistical meta-analysis aggregated data generated by studies of cancer patients' information needs. Meta-research approaches have also been applied to studies outside the health informatics field: Liu (2021) applied Wilson's information needs framework to a meta-narrative synthesis of fifteen studies of student entrepreneurs' information needs, Perrier et al. (2018) applied a meta-ethnographic approach to exploring academic libraries' roles in research data management, and Catalano (2013) conducted quantitative and qualitative meta-analysis of studies about graduate students' information seeking behaviour.

Meta-ethnography

An approach to the meta-synthesis of qualitative research, meta-ethnography's focus on human experience renders it particularly appropriate for this project. In their overview of meta-ethnography, Noblit and Hare (1988, p. 10) describe the method as one that '*compares and analyses texts, creating new interpretations in the process*'. Meta-ethnography involves translating themes revealed by one study into another, with a goal not of generating analysis, but of interpretation and improved understanding.

Noblit and Hare (1988, p. 14) identify several goals of meta-ethnography:

1. more interpretive literature reviews
2. critical examination of multiple accounts of an event, situation, and so forth

3. systematic comparison of case studies to draw cross-case conclusions
4. a way of talking about our work and comparing it to the works of others
5. synthesis of ethnographic studies

Meta-ethnography involves several phases. Noblit and Hare emphasise that these are not discrete steps, but can, in fact, be iterative or occur in parallel.

1. Getting started: identifying the research issue of interest, ascertaining its appropriateness for a meta-ethnographic approach
2. Deciding what is relevant to the initial interest: determining which individual studies should be incorporated into the meta-ethnography to satisfy the initial interest.
3. Reading the studies
4. Determining how the studies are related: identifying the essential concepts and metaphors in individual studies for collective consideration
5. Translating the studies into one another: explaining the connections between studies, particularly their key similarities and differences. Noblit and Hare (1988) do not use the term 'translate' in a literal sense; rather, meta-ethnographic translations involve '*salient categories of meaning*' (p. 77) When studies are about a similar topic, this phase involves '*reciprocal*' translation. Translations may also be '*refutational*', i.e., one or more study's findings might contradict those of one or more other studies.
6. Synthesising translations: '*making a whole into something more than the parts alone imply*' (Noblit and Hare, 1988, p. 29).
7. Expressing the synthesis: packaging the synthesis in a format appropriate for its subject and audience. This may manifest as a '*line-of-argument*' synthesis, presenting a holistic explanation for the collective translations of the synthesised works. Line-of-argument synthesis is closely related to grounded theoretical analysis, in which the data under review are used to generate a theoretical explanation for the phenomena they describe.

Strengths and weaknesses of meta-ethnography

Among approaches to meta-synthesis, meta-ethnography stands out for its capacity to '*retain the uniqueness and holism*' of individual works of research designed and conducted within an interpretive framework as we compare and synthesise them in analysis (Noblit and Hare, 1988, preface). As is the case with all approaches to meta-synthesis, however, according to Timulak (2014) those claiming to synthesise findings from a collection of research products run the risk of providing '*a particular synthesis coloured by an interpretive perspective*' of the individual performing the analysis (p. 492). The same author also makes the astute observation that those conducting meta-analysis of any kind are limited by the quality of the research they are analysing and '*can work only with the data that are available to them and can only transparently point to the problems (if they are present) in the original studies*' (Timulak, 2014, p. 493).

Research design

This project uses Noblit and Hare's meta-ethnographic model to explore the findings presented in 23 recent studies of artists' information-related experiences. These steps are described in the following section.

Getting started and determining relevant works

The objective of this project is reviewing the existing body of research related to artists' and creatives' information behaviour. Studies of the role of information in the creative process employ a variety of methods, are grounded in a range of theoretical frameworks and present multiple models for understanding creative artists' information behaviour.

The body of literature for analysis was collected using a structured search of the *Library and information sciences abstracts (LISA)*, *Library and information science source* and *Library, information science, and technology abstracts (LISTA)* databases of LIS literature:

“information seeking” OR “information behavior”) AND music*

This was repeated for each of the creative arts included in the study. The approach generated over 250 results published between 1996 and 2024, the abstracts of which were reviewed to assess relevance. Those papers that addressed arts-related *information as thing*, for example, information architecture or mechanisms for information retrieval, were discarded. Several studies addressed information behaviour of more than one type of artist and were included in multiple categories.

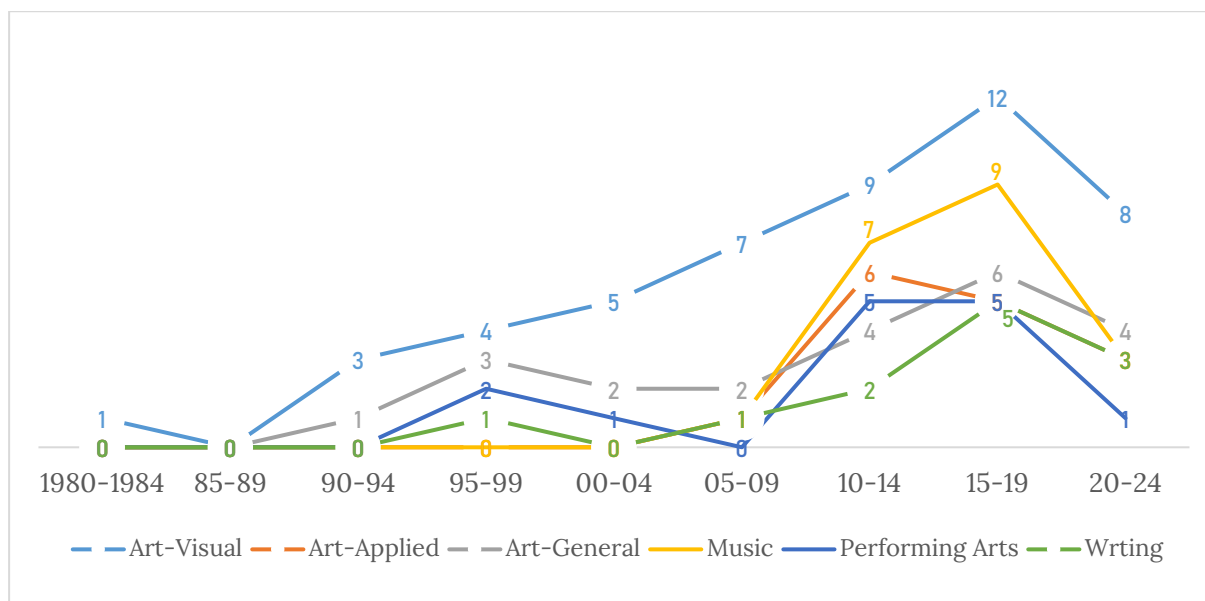


Figure 1. Arts-related information seeking and behaviour research by sub-field, 1980-2024.

While this volume of text would be appropriate for a quantitative content or meta-analysis, it is too large for a meta-ethnographic approach. Therefore, the publication date scope of the texts was limited to those published 2019-2024 (Please see *Corpus* for bibliographical information about studies included in the meta-ethnography).

Sub-Area	1996-2024	2019-24
Arts, General	20	3
Applied Arts	14	4
Visual Arts	52	4
Music	18	4
Performing Arts (incl. Dance, Theatre)	14	3
Literature	10	5

Table 1. Summary of publications by sub-area and date range.

Limiting the publication dates for the body of work to be synthesised generated a more manageable number of studies (23) for close analysis while preserving a reasonable distribution of individual creative fields.

Reading the studies and determining relationships

These studies were reviewed for the following characteristics:

- Creative field of study
- Focus of study (research questions, when articulated)
- Type of individual involved in study; number of participants, when available
- Method employed for data collection
- Major findings and conclusions

When applicable:

- Methodological and/or theoretical framework (study design)
- Implications of findings for information professionals

To these I added my own observations as I read, specifically, asking myself the following questions (articulated in the notes column, Table 2):

1. How are the artist and information each framed by the author?
 - a. Is the artist the agent of interest in the study, or is information the entity of interest?
2. Is the author exploring *information in the life of the artist* as a person, i.e., holistically, or only regarding the process of creating their art?
3. Are information resources or specific formats emphasised, e.g., library collections, print materials, etc.

Studies were reviewed by topical subcollection rather than in alphabetical or chronological order. This allowed intermediate *translations* of themes within each creative activity prior to attempting integration of themes from all 23 studies.

A template for analysis was employed to guide close reading, an entry from which (Einarsson and Herzum's 2021 study of *makerspace makers*) is excerpted and annotated in Table 2.

Field	Focus	Population	Study design	Data collection	Results	Notes
Arts-applied	How makers obtain information for their makerspace projects.	13 makerspace makers	Serious leisure? Four investigated information sources are people, documents, experimentation, and prior knowledge across stages of making Directed content analysis (quant) w/ thick description	Semi structured Interviews – walk through of maker activity	(a) experimentation a prime source of information, (b) ease/pleasure dominant relevance criteria, (c) process/situation receive little attention, and (d) info sources vary across process stages. results emphasise the importance of experimentation; suggest it warrants closer attention in studies of makers' and creative pros' IB (1528) Many makers rely on people as guides	Making is a leisure activity. As such, IB might differ from that of creative professionals in same media Social aspect of making as or more important than creative design Experimentation is an important source of information and is under-studied quality of information assessment includes social aspect

Table 2. Example of entry, meta-ethnographic study analysis guide

An entry was completed for each of the 23 studies under review. This document was used to facilitate and support the translation process as described by Noblit and Hare.

Translations and synthesis (findings)

Rather than generating a definitive *answer* or concrete finding, meta-ethnography provides an opportunity to explore a subject and offer preliminary conclusions. In that spirit, I offer the themes and commonalities I observed during my close review of these texts, discussed in the sections that follow.

Studies of artists' information behaviour range from theoretical or philosophical discussions of artists' conceptualisation of information and its role in their creative lives, to models categorising artists' information needs and uses in relation to their creative endeavours (and the tangible products thereof). For organisational purposes, discussion of themes follows this progression. Research also reveals interesting themes regarding artists' experiences with information-as-thing to be evaluated and managed, discussion of which follows the coverage of information behaviour.

Information and the artists' endeavour

Meta-ethnographic analysis of this body of literature generates a number of observations regarding artists' information behaviour with regard to their creative work.

While the meaning of information remains contested in information science, artists' view of information reflects an expansive interpretation of the concept. Visual artists, writers and musicians all cite, at times, emotions, memories, observations and their lived environments as

sources of information to support their craft. This reflects another common theme: the high degree of vulnerability associated with and required by artistic creation. While not universal, some studies report on artists' emotions regarding their creativity-related information behaviour. Interestingly, few artists seem to report feeling frustrated or anxious if they are unable to locate information easily. This raises an interesting possibility regarding how artists view their relationship with information versus those engaged with information for other purposes. Is it possible that artists view engaging with information as an opportunity for engaging in creative dialogue rather than addressing a deficit?

Creation as informative process

Among the theoretical frameworks employed in studies of artists' information behaviour, sensemaking features prominently. Such discussions often reference artists' tendency to view creation itself as sensemaking, or *information-as-process*. Artists also describe creating art as engaging in a dialogue with themselves, one '*informed by prior knowledge and experiences, including learnings from prior projects*' (Einarsson and Hertzum, 2021, p. 1529). Art creation is often self-referential: visual and applied artists, musicians and composers, and writers in particular build a body of work that is frequently iterative, exploring similar themes and referring back to previous works of the artist's creation. Hunt and Jennings (2021, p. 51) remind us that artists' works are '*vehicles for understanding*' and are '*information in themselves*'. Krtalic' and Dinneen (2024, p. 190) describe these prior experiences and documentation of them '*in the form of visual diaries, blogs and podcasts*' as a source of information.

In this way, we can consider the act of creation itself an informative process, '*centered on personal exploration or tacit knowledge*' (Hunt and Jennings, 2021, p. 38). Cooper (2023, unpagged) describes the process of creating art as '*dynamic information making*' involving artists' referencing themselves and their other work, a '*unique information*' process. Menzel (2022, p. 14) describes the research or information seeking writers do in support of their work as evolving into instances of '*introspective insight*'. Hunt and Jennings (2021, p. 33) describe this self-interrogation as '*knowledge creation*' for future work.

Internal and embodied sources of information

The theme of artists drawing upon *internalised* or experiential information relates closely to the concept of embodied information. While we might expect the idea of embodied information to appear in dancers' and musicians' accounts of their relationships with information, it is also common in those of visual artists and writers. In Hunt and Jennings' (2023, p. 37) words, '*the act of making or engaging in a regular artistic practice is also an embodied methodology for creating knowledge or resolving an inquiry*'. *Shadowing* individuals is mentioned frequently as a source of information and inspiration to support writing, and writers also indicate a strong preference for learning by doing.

In addition to conducting archival research, one of the visual artists Hunt and Jennings (2021, p. 44) discuss conducts research that is archival as well as sensory: '*I listen a lot. Like I listen and smell a lot*'. Rowlandson-O'Hara (2020, p. 107) quotes composers who mention, respectively, '*drugs (cannabis and psychedelics)*', '*exercising*,' and '*laying in a warm bed; going to sleep*' as sources of creative information or inspiration. Vamanu and Terronez's case study of Ballet Folklorico (2021) describes the importance of embodied information to dance and other performative arts in detail, extending the model of enacted information to include new ways of understanding information conveyed physically or through ambient factors such as music, audience and collective activity.

Artistic dialogue as information

Creating many types of art – visual, literary – is a solitary enterprise. Even those creative endeavours that are accomplished collectively, such as some types of dance, theatrical, and/or musical performance, have a highly individual element. Despite many artists' creative acts

occurring in isolation, a common finding in studies of their information behaviour is a strong preference for and reliance on personal connections as information sources. Many artists describe creating art as participating in a community and engaging in an ongoing dialogue, a '*conversation with being*' (Gorichanaz, 2019, p. 688). One of Krtalic' and Dinneen's (2024, p. 190) study participants described incorporating themes and discussion of other authors' works '*as a way into a broader conversation and context to reveal stories and insights into who they are and why they do what they do*'. According to Cooper (2023, p. 30), engaging with others' work places artists '*in a larger, stimulating conversation,*' one that '*has the potential to be dialogic and embodied through materials and making*' (Hunt and Jennings, 2021, p. 38).

Artists' information behaviour(s)

Information needs and uses

Several of the reviewed studies include models of information needs and uses, many of which were informed or inspired by Susie Cobbledick's (1996) and Bradley Hemmig's (2008, 2009) models of visual artists' information behaviour. Based on a review of the existing literature and personal observation, Cobbledick (1996, p. 347) developed five categories for visual artists' information needs: inspiration, specific visual information (models), technical information, information about the art world, and business information. Hemmig (2008, p. 355) reviewed the literature published after Cobbledick's influential article and expanded the model to include '*information on subjects unrelated to art*'. Hemmig (2009, p. 694) refined Cobbledick's categories through a survey of practising visual artists. His model identified inspiration, specific visual elements, knowledge of materials and techniques, and marketing and career guidance as his subjects' information uses. Hemmig's characterisation of these activities as '*information uses*' feels deliberate, especially considering many other studies' conflation of *information need* and *information use*.

While Cobbledick's (1996) and Hemmig's (2008, 2009) models of information needs and uses were developed specifically for visual artists, researchers studying creators in other media have adapted them to describe the information needs and uses of their subject groups. Krtalic' and Dinneen (2024, p. 190) describe writers and artists seeking information '*for inspiration, visual reference, technical information, information about exhibition and sales, and trends in the art world*'. Zhang and Capra (2020, p. 116) identified seven usage intents for information generated through search: '*(1) to learn how to do something, (2) to seek inspiration, (3) for ideation (e.g., generate new ideas), (4) to evaluate and select ideas, (5) for project planning (e.g., conducting research to plan a project), (6) to make a purchasing decision, and (7) to keep motivated*'.

Rather than focusing on information uses, Menzel (2022, p. 42) categorised fiction and poetry writers' information needs as fact seeking (specific), context seeking (broad or abstract), inspiration seeking (experiences), and activities and life (engaging with the world).

Information seeking

It is interesting to note that artists' information needs are diverse not only in terms of subject matter but also in level of complexity or sophistication. Artists are experts in many aspects of their work, requiring highly specialised and domain-specific information, while also needing very basic information about other subjects of interest. As a result, artists seek information from a wide variety of sources, sometimes in service of a single creative output.

The diversity of artists' information behaviours can render the appearance of their practices as haphazard or unstructured, but Cooper (2023) argues that the appearance of chaos is merely a reflection of this multidisciplinarity. Artists of all kinds skim magazines, formally and informally engage with experts, speak with colleagues and friends and query social media connections. They read, engage in *shadowing* behaviours and watch video demonstrations. According to several studies, artists of all kinds tend to engage with visual representations of information more than other user groups. Visual and applied artists, performers, musicians and composers, and writers

all discuss utilising visual representations to satisfy information needs as well as relying on images for inspirational information.

Other information behaviours

Some models incorporate information activities beyond needs and use. Cooper (2023, unpagged) expands Hemmig's (2009) and other models to include the information practices of sharing (engaging with other artists), feeding (collecting inspiration, deliberately or passively) and balancing (determining how much information to engage with, and in what manner), each of which features subtypes.

The subcategory of information behaviour classified as *avoidance* also plays a prominent role in artists' activities, and interestingly, is not typically viewed as negative. Cooper (2023) categorises information avoiding as a type of *balancing* behaviour through which artists protect their own vision, technique and capacity to create. Cooper described study participants as avoiding information in order to set boundaries or protective barriers around their own artistic practice. Hosier (2022) indicates some writers see excessive information seeking as a form of procrastination and believe gathering too much information can hamstring a writer if done too early in the process. In some cases, artists avoid information presented in human form, fearing excessive influence from colleagues or mentors (Einarsson and Hertzum, 2021). Artists also discuss editing or cutting information from their work as an aspect of information behaviour related to creativity.

Uses of information

The distinction between discussing why artists use information and what artists use information for is perhaps small but feels sufficiently significant to warrant discussion.

Information for inspiration and motivation

Across artistic domains, artists report using information to inspire their own work. Perhaps predictably, artists are highly creative in seeking information: one of Menzel's (2022, p. 65) writers described enrolling in a drawing class, hoping it would spur inspiration. A composer told Rowlandson-O'Hara (2020, p. 32) that they draw inspiration from poetry, while another gains insight from '*mathematical formulas and concepts*' (p. 37). Artists of all types also prize information discovered through browsing or *serendipity*, particularly as a source of inspiration. informational material frequently spurs inspiration, and the source can be impossible to anticipate. Lee et al. (2019, p. 703) describe artists' search for inspiration as '*an information-heavy process*' with '*varied, idiosyncratic*' sources that '*exist everywhere*'. Makri, et al. (2019, p. 776) describe '*inspirational search*' as a process through which information retrieved is '*intelligible but not predictable*', and Smyth et al. (2022, p. 401) make the point that '*[i]nspiration is inherently interconnected with the concepts of browsing and interdisciplinarity*'.

While not a direct reflection of artists' information behaviour, it is worth noting that several of the reviewed studies mention the extent to which non-artists fail to consider that creating art involves information as either a source of initial inspiration or during the creation process. In essence, non-artists believe in the notion of the *muse* implanting fully formed ideas in artists' heads. One composer quoted by Rowlandson-O'Hara (2020, p. 110) expressed frustration with this view, saying '*Argh! You clearly are of the opinion that artists "stumble" across creative inspiration*'. Another commented, more gently, '*the way this question is framed assumes that composers seek "inspiration" or creative solutions outside of music itself. The problem with this is that it has the potential to reduce musical composition to an externally inspired art, rather than focusing on the hard work of learning the technical tools of the craft itself*' (Rowlandson-O'Hara, 2020, p. 107). Several authors cited Cobbledick's (1996) influential study of visual artists' information behaviours, in which she discussed the '*persistent myth of the artist as a divinely inspired genius, someone who draws on an inner well of creativity rather than looking to outside sources for inspiration or knowledge*' (Hosier,

2022, p. 1067). While some studies of creatives' information behaviour reflect this language, most make clear that artists' information behaviours are complex and driven by explicit and tacit need. Menzel (2022, p. 44) rejects the notion that *'inspiration and specific information'* represent dichotomous needs for writers, instead choosing to create a model of writers' *'information-seeking behavior using a spectrum of factual and experiential inquiry'*.

Studies also cited the motivating potential of information. One of Zhang and Capra's (2020, p. 119) respondents described finding information that would *'serve as a "motivation booster" to help her keep going on her project'*.

Information for accuracy, verisimilitude and authenticity

Although several studies discuss the importance of information for adding texture and depth to visual or literary portrayals, Cooper (2023, unpagged) points out, *'unlike other professionals, artists are not bound by information needing to be true ... to be useful'*. Several studies did discuss the concept of *creative or artistic licence*, noting that artists' comfort with the idea of taking liberties with factual information was highly dependent upon context. The writers who participated in Menzel's (2022, p. 12) study used information to create *'their own meanings ... often interpreting sources through creative motivations rather than full commitment to factual interpretation'*. Participants in the study were highly circumspect about the instances in which this was appropriate. One remarked, *'I want to be very factual. I don't want to be deemed not-factual in a book that talks about snippets of history'* (Menzel, 2022, p. 49). One of Zhang and Capra's (2020, p. 118) respondents sought information to increase the accuracy of a project. Respondents made judgements, however, about when and how to prioritise factual accuracy. One of Hosier's (2024, p. 801) respondents explained, *'I'm more comfortable playing around with stuff I really know, whereas if I don't really know it, I feel like I have to prove that I do'*. Another indicated accuracy is important, but sometimes *'the flowers have to talk'* (p. 801). Dalal (2023, p. 799) discusses the phenomenon of theatrical designers' fidelity to truthfully portraying the *'world of the play'* in an emotional or intellectual sense, although sometimes not literally.

Information evaluation management

In addition to discussing information needs, seeking and use, studies of artists' information behaviour also address their approaches to valuing and evaluating information and managing *information-as-thing*. As a rule, all types of creative artists find visual representations of information – images, videos, their surroundings – highly valuable. Helpful types of visual information mentioned in the studies reviewed included fine art observed during a museum visit as well as Pinterest boards and sketches. Many artists collect and *'organize for later use'* archives of images and other representations of information they believe might serve as sources of inspiration for future works (Lee et al., 2019, p. 704). Rowlandson-O'Hara (2020, p. 55) describes these collections as *'creative insight [their preferred term for inspiration] storage units'* (CISUs), which composers use to *'conceptualize pieces, draw out structures, and brainstorm'*. Dalal and Shane (2023, p. 2) describe theatrical designers creating a *'morgue'* of images *'categorized by historical period, age, and even types of injuries, to refer to as needed'*.

Artists self-archive, collecting and maintaining records about their own work, information seeking and use behaviours and creative processes. Krtalic' and Dinneen (2024, p. 199) note authors see these collections as *'valuable ... as a source of information for later reuse and inspiration'* but may not fully grasp their utility for others. Rowlandson-O'Hara's (2020) study of composers' information behaviours includes descriptions and visual representations of several participants' personal archives.

Implications for information professionals

Perhaps due to researchers' proximity to artist colleagues at their institutions, subjects of studies of artists' information behaviour are frequently affiliated with academic institutions of higher

education. As such, studies tend to discuss the challenges of fitting creative works in the model for scholarly outputs most typically endorsed by the academy. Similarly, some studies of artists' research and information seeking activities note librarians' and information professionals' failure to acknowledge the significant differences from the research needs and activities of students and faculty in the sciences, social sciences and humanities. Smyth, et al. (2022, p. 401) point out that 'Scholarship as Conversation,' one of the Association of College and Research Libraries' (ACRL) Framework[s] for Information Literacy *'applies just as much to creative work as it does to research with outputs traditionally valued more highly by the academy'*..

While some artists are affiliated with academic institutions as students or faculty and therefore have access to scholarly resources for their information needs, most artists have no such affiliation and are subject to practical considerations, such as the financial cost of high-quality information. Libraries could support artists' needs through increased outreach efforts to artist communities in their area, informing them of available resources and services to support their work.

The value artists place on browsing for and visual resources as information suggests several implications for information agencies who wish to better support their work. Several studies point out that libraries' traditional approaches to organising materials might stymie rather than support creative investigation. While none of the studies reviewed offered a solution to this problem, it was widely acknowledged as an issue. Studies did suggest that libraries might improve instructional offerings for creative artists, incorporating research and search skills training, visual literacy instruction and curated presentations of information specifically for creative user groups (Menzel, 2022, p. 78).

Conclusions and areas for future research

This project offers an impression of the commonalities among creative artists' experiences of information in relationship to their creative practices. Suggestions for immediate future research fall into three broad categories:

Expansion: broadening the collection of studies under analysis to include research published prior to 2019, which includes several influential studies.

The importance and informative value of experimentation in art creation emerged as an important theme in some of the research, one that deserves further study in ISB research.

Comparison/translation: reviewing this overview of artists' relationship with information in relation to studies of other large groups, such as social scientists, scientists, humanists and specific professions.

Application/verification: using the observations described in this meta-ethnography to conduct new studies of artists' information behaviours for verification and expansion purposes.

While there is a significant body of research related to visual artists' and musicians' and composers' information behaviour, the other performing arts, including acting, dance and singing, are especially under-studied, as are the creative writing fields. The applied arts and crafts have also not been addressed sufficiently and offer intriguing possibilities for incorporating folklife-based theoretical frameworks into the discussion of this area of practice.

The United States' National Endowment for the Arts (NEA, 2022, p. 10) *50 states of arts participation* report describes US residents' engagement with the arts. In the most recent report, 52 per cent of (adult) respondents reported having created or performed art in the prior year. While the report does not provide data regarding frequency of respondents' engagement with creative activities, or the number of respondents creating art professionally, we can safely assume that a very large number of adults in the US are regularly engaged with creating art. Considering their activities

related to engaging with information in support of their creative activities also suggests promising, and distinct, areas of enquiry.

The growing body of research related to artists' information behaviours contradicts Jean Cocteau's assertion that '*an artist cannot speak about his art any more than a plant can discuss horticulture*' (Newsweek, 1955, p. 98). On the contrary, many artists describe their creative process and information's role in it eloquently and accessibly. As of this writing, however, there is a need for additional research in this area, both as a whole and in terms of practitioners of specific media and arts-related fields.

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