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Artists' Long-term Process for Making Art

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For creative experts such as artists, their goal is not just to acquire the skills or techniques of their particular fields. It is also important for them to continue to produce high-quality new and unique works using those skills and techniques. How they become able to do this is a question that needs to be explored.

With regard to creating new ideas or concepts, some researchers have suggested that selecting the good ones after many random variants is a useful strategy (e. g., Cziko, 1995). However, using such an approach, we would not come to understand how artists create their unique styles through decades of long-term art-making activities. Studies on the creative process of professional artists (e. g., Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976; Yokochi & Okada, 2005) have also focused on the artists' process of making only a small number of products in a relatively short period. Thus these studies were also not able to reveal the long-term process of making art. Our study aims to describe changes in the creative process through many years of art-making experiences.

Study 1

We investigated how artists at different career stages make their artworks.

Methods We interviewed four artists, a female in her 20s and males in their 30s, 40s, and 50s, respectively, to investigate what kind of art-making intention they formed and how the series of artworks changed through their art-making experience. We asked, for instance, about what their concept of each artwork was, and when and how the series of artworks changed.

Results It was revealed that proficient artists changed their series of artwork several times, and created artwork based on their long-term intention (i.e., their main theme for making art). On the other hand, young artists did not yet recognize their long-term intention and made artwork based on their temporary interests.

Study 2

We investigated when and how the artists changed their series of artworks.

Methods We interviewed nine contemporary artists (average age of 44.2), using the same procedure as in Study 1.

Results All artists had changed artwork series several times. The first change occurred at an average of 3.9 years after they started their careers as artists. Six artists out of nine changed their artwork series a second time at an average of 5.6 years after the first change. All artists formed their long-term intention at the average age of 36.0 years old, approximately 12.7 years after starting their careers as artists. An analysis of the interviews revealed that artists made artwork based on external criteria when they were young. However, as they realized limitations in their art making, they started to focus on internal criteria for their artistic choices. After changing artwork series several times, artists formed their long-term intention for making art. They mentioned that they became able to produce various types of original artwork with confidence, based on their long-term intention.

Conclusion

In this research, we focused on the process of change in the artist's style of making art through experience. The results suggest that artists' long-term intention for making art play important roles in the process of developing their styles.

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