

PURCHASING CREATIVITY: A STUDY OF EXPLORATION AND EMOTION BEHIND COLLECTORS' CHOSEN WORKS

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Abstract. This study explores creative strategies in producing artworks that suit collectors' preferences without compromising artistic integrity. The focus of this study is to identify cognitive, emotional, and relational mechanisms, as well as to analyze the influence of artist-collector relationships on the development of artistic strategies. Using a qualitative approach with comparative idiographic case studies, data was obtained through in-depth interviews with artists and collectors. Findings show that artistic creativity manifests itself in three strategies: color palette evolution, theme transformation, and responsiveness to contemporary contexts, which maintain artistic consistency with minimal compromise. This mechanism focuses on emotional adjustment, where artworks are created from the artist's authentic joy, resulting in strong resonance with collectors. Long-term relationships are facilitated through studio visits and curatorial dialogues. This research contributes to the theory of artistic creativity and provides practical insights for young artists and galleries that are responsive to the market.

Keywords: Artistic inventiveness, aesthetic exploration, emotional resonance, artist-collector relationships, creative strategies, co-creation

INTRODUCTION

Creativity is a fundamental construct that underpins the production and appreciation of art in contemporary life. It functions not only as an individual cognitive capacity, but also as a complex and dynamic social process (Brown, 2024; Vuichard et al., 2023). Within the global art market ecosystem, artistic creativity is a pivotal element that facilitates connections between artists and collectors, thereby engendering interconnected aesthetic, economic, and cultural value (De Simone, 2025; Grau Pérez, 2025). Recent research suggests that the creative process of artists does not operate in isolation, but is closely linked to the expectations, preferences, and aesthetic experiences of collectors, which shape the dynamics of the contemporary art market (Messer et al., 2024; Sorokowski et al., 2024). Significant transformations in the global art market have led to the emergence of new collectors who emphasise personal connections, authenticity, and direct engagement with artists. Indeed, in 2024, 46% of all online art sales were made by novice collectors (Maddox Gallery, 2025). This phenomenon underlies the importance of understanding how artists develop creative strategies to create works that resonate with collectors, making this area of study globally important in the context of the creative economy.

Although extensive research has been conducted on the motivations behind art purchases by collectors, where 71% of collectors buy art for home decoration and 67% for daily inspiration (Arun Kakar, 2024), there is still a lack of research exploring the influence of factors such as aesthetics, emotional resonance, and socio-cultural validation on purchasing decisions (Li & Li, 2022; Townsend & Shu, 2010). As a result, further research is needed to understand the perspectives of artists in developing creative strategies to respond to collectors' preferences. A review of the existing literature shows a tendency for researchers to focus on collector behaviour and market dynamics (Arun Kakar, 2025; Bank of America, 2025). However, there is still little research exploring how artists strategically integrate their understanding of collector exploration into their creative process. Nevertheless, there is a critical gap in the existing literature on "artistic creativity" regarding artists' ability to develop innovative approaches that bridge artistic integrity with appeal (market demand) (Swanzy-Impraim et al., 2025). This phenomenon is widespread in contemporary art practice, but a

comprehensive theoretical framework explaining the cognitive, emotional, and strategic mechanisms artists use in creating works that become collector favourites is still difficult to find. This understanding is crucial for the development of artistic capacity and the sustainability of the art ecosystem.

Aesthetic exploration is a psychological construct that underlies how individuals, both artists and collectors, engage in the search for, connection with, and testing of meaning in works of art (Botella et al., 2016; Mumford & McIntosh, 2017). In the context of artistic creation, the process of aesthetic exploration by artists is characterised by a series of complex cognitive procedures. These include the construction of problems, the coding of information, the search for categories, the combination and reorganisation of category information to identify novel solutions, the evaluation of ideas, the implementation of ideas, and the monitoring of progress (Mumford & McIntosh, 2017). The extant research highlights the various stages of the creative process (immersion, thinking, research, inspiration, insight, ideation, selection, testing, experimentation, and judgement) and micro-levels that explain the mechanisms behind idea creation, such as divergent and convergent thinking (Vuichard et al., 2023). Artists who are effective in creating works that become favourites among collectors demonstrate an ability to integrate their personal aesthetic exploration with an understanding of how collectors conduct their own aesthetic exploration, such as seeking connections between content, contours and context (Li & Li, 2022). The interaction between the aesthetic exploration of artists and collectors creates a dialogical space where creativity is no longer an individual phenomenon but a collective one (Studies, 2025). However, a research gap emerges in understanding how artists strategically anticipate and respond to collectors' aesthetic exploration in the process of creating their works.

Emotional Resonance and Socio-Cultural Validation

Emotional resonance has been identified as a crucial mediator between aesthetic perception and purchasing decisions in the art market. Convergences between personal values, aesthetic experiences and socio-cultural contexts have been demonstrated to occur at moments of emotional 'click' (De Simone, 2025; Strang, 2025). Research in the field of neuroaesthetics has demonstrated that engagement in creative activities has been shown to enhance synaptic density and activate neural circuits implicated in emotional processing, thereby enhancing emotional resilience (Strang, 2025). It is asserted that artists who comprehend the mechanisms of emotional resonance are capable of formulating strategies to create works that are not only visually aesthetic but also capable of eliciting profound emotional responses in collectors (Townsend & Shu, 2010). The process of socio-cultural validation serves to further transform artistic creativity into perceived credibility of the work's value (Berthinier-Poncet, 2025). Contemporary collectors, particularly millennials and Gen Z, who constituted 25-33% of all art auction bidders in 2024, are placing increasing emphasis on the importance of personal connection and authenticity in their relationships with artists (Katya Kazakina, 2025). Despite the importance of emotional resonance and socio-cultural validation in the art ecosystem, there is still a limited understanding of how artists proactively develop strategies to optimise these two dimensions in their creative process, whether through subject selection, visual techniques, personal narratives, or relational strategies with collectors.

Rationalisation, Negotiation, and Domestication of Meaning

The decision-making process of art collectors includes a rationalisation phase, during which factors such as scarcity, alignment with the collection's identity, artistic narrative, and suitability for personal space are evaluated after initial emotional resonance is established (Art Basel & UBS, 2024; Beda, 2025). Recent research indicates that while emotional appeal remains the primary motivation for acquisition, cited by 60% of collectors, there has been a notable shift: 41% of collectors now identify financial value as their main incentive, surpassing social value at 36% for the first time in over a decade (Timeless Investments, 2024). Price acts as a constraint once the creative value of an artwork is recognized, with negotiations taking place within a framework shaped by emotional conviction (Bank of America, 2025). The meaning demonstration phase constitutes post-purchase co-creation, wherein collectors engage in space curation, narrative reinterpretation, and archive maintenance, thereby transforming artworks into integral components of their personal and social identities. Artists who comprehend this entire cycle, from emotional resonance to meaning demonstration, can formulate more comprehensive strategies for producing works that are

both immediately appealing and capable of retaining value and significance over time. Although prior research has identified discrete phases in collectors' selection processes, a gap remains in understanding how artists anticipate and incorporate this full cycle into their creative strategies to produce works that become enduring collector favorites.

Based on the identified knowledge gaps and the established theoretical framework, this study aims to answer specific questions, namely to understand how artists develop and implement inventive strategies in their creative processes, as well as exploring the cognitive, emotional and relational mechanisms used to integrate an understanding of collectors' expectations without compromising artistic integrity, and how the relationship between artists and collectors influences the development of artistic strategies in creating works that resonate with collectors' aesthetic and emotional preferences.

The response to this question will address a theoretical lacuna by providing a conceptual framework of 'artistic inventivity' as a construct that bridges the internal creative processes of artists with the external dynamics of the art market. The theoretical contribution of this research is twofold. Firstly, it has developed an integrative model that explains how artists strategically navigate between personal artistic expression and responsiveness to collector preferences. In practical terms, the findings of this research can provide insights for emerging artists in developing a more strategic approach to their creative practice, as well as assist galleries, curators and art educators in facilitating a more productive dialogue between artists and collectors.

RESEARCH METHOD

A qualitative approach was applied, using an idiographic comparative case study design to facilitate an in-depth understanding of specific phenomena in real-life contexts (Greenhalgh, 2025; Lim, 2025). Purposive sampling with predetermined criteria was used to select participants who had relevant knowledge and experience related to the phenomenon under study (Ahmed, 2024; Campbell et al., 2020). The informants worked as architects and art collectors and were selected for his or to his unique expertise in spatial aesthetics, visual design, and art appreciation. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured in-depth interviews, allowing for a comprehensive and contextual exploration of participants' experiences (Mammen et al., 2025; Xu et al., 2025). Thematic analysis was conducted using a six-stage systematic process: (1) transcription and familiarisation, involving repeated reading of transcripts and selection of relevant quotations; (2) keyword identification, focusing on recurring or meaningful terms based on the 6R criteria (originality, richness, repetition, rationality, responsiveness, grandeur); (3) coding, involving the labelling of data segments with concise codes through inductive and deductive methods; (4) theme development, grouping codes to identify patterns of relationships; (5) conceptualisation and interpretation, defining concepts and mapping relationships between concepts using diagrams or models; and (6) construction of conceptual models to synthesise findings and answer questions related to artistic creativity (Ahmed, 2024; Naeem et al., 2023). Data validity is maintained through triangulation of sources, techniques, and verification procedures (Bennis & Mouwafaq, 2025). In addition, discussions with art experts are conducted to ensure credibility, transferability, reliability, and confirmation, which are the four pillars of qualitative research reliability (Campbell et al., 2020).

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Based on an analysis of interview data with collectors and artists, this study reveals complex findings about how artistic creativity and collector preferences interact within the contemporary art ecosystem.

3.1 Artists' Inventive Strategies in Creating Works that Resonate with Collectors' Preferences

The findings of research conducted to date indicate that artists develop complex inventive strategies in creating works that resonate with collectors' preferences without compromising their personal artistic integrity. Interview data with artists indicates that artistic inventivity manifests itself in the form of selective creative adaptation, whereby artists maintain a 'strong and stubborn character' as the foundation of their artistic identity while opening space for limited compromises that do not alter the essence of the artwork. The artists participating in the study asserted that artists who possess a strong sense of idealism tend to demonstrate greater resilience and ultimately establish their own unique market presence. Indeed, artists who are susceptible to the influence of collectors and market trends may experience a decline in their perceived value. This statement indicates that inventive strategies do not represent a form of capitulation to market demand; rather, they are a negotiation strategy that prioritises artistic consistency as the primary value.

The creative adaptive strategies of artists manifest themselves in three main dimensions: namely, colour palette adaptation, theme evolution, and responsiveness to the contemporary context. The artists participating in this study disclosed that his artworks had historically gravitated towards monochrome colours, but that they had recently initiated a process of experimentation with colours, albeit within the confines of their preferred colour palette. This adaptation of colour palettes represents an inventive strategy in which artists anticipate the visual preferences of collectors while maintaining personal aesthetic consistency. The evolution of artistic themes has also been identified as a significant strategy, whereby artists transition from the technical realism of previous periods to a more expressive style. This transformation suggests that artistic inventiveness is not solely a response to external expectations, but rather an internal rediscovery process that engenders works that are more authentic and, paradoxically, more appealing to collectors.

Furthermore, artists have been shown to develop inventive strategies through a deep understanding of collector psychology and market dynamics. As demonstrated by the available data, artists are aware of collectors' preferences regarding unique and personal works of art, which are considered more appealing to collectors. Collectors also invariably pay close attention to artists who have a prominent artistic reputation, who are reliable in every phase of the creative process and who consistently maintain the highest standards of quality. This understanding enables artists to adopt a dual-track strategy, encompassing the maintenance of technical consistency alongside the pursuit of a more profound exploration of their artistic identity.



Fig. 1 . interview with artist Joni Ramlan

3.2 Cognitive, Emotional, and Relational Mechanisms in Collector Expectation Integration

The cognitive mechanisms employed by artists in the integration of collectors' expectations are predicated on the premise that artistic authenticity and market desirability are not mutually exclusive entities, but rather dimensions that can be integrated through strategic reflection. The data indicates that artists utilise feedback from collectors as a signal of validation, yet do not prioritise it as the primary determinate of creative decisions. Artists have asserted that collectors recognise their ability to create works of art, but their focus remains on the physical object itself. This statement suggests that sophisticated collectors are capable of discerning the artist's emotional absence in the work, thereby underscoring the importance of ensuring that each work is created from a place of joy and authentic emotional engagement.

The emotional mechanisms employed by artists are indicative of a recalibration process between personal joy in the creative process and anticipatory empathy towards the emotional responses of collectors. The artistic expression of transformation in creative practices is a subject that has been explored by numerous artists. Should alterations be perceived in the artist's oeuvre, it is indicative of the influence of the spirit of painting, which has prompted the artist to engage in the act of painting with a sense of contentment. This emotional recalibration is not a disregard for collectors' expectations, but rather an intuitive understanding that works produced from authentic joy will generate stronger emotional resonance with collectors. The collector's perspective, as evidenced by the available data, corroborates this finding. Collectors have described the moment of "click" with a work as an experience that *"makes us smile to ourselves, that feeling of joy definitely arises because there are sweet memories attached to the artwork"*.

The relational mechanism that facilitates the integration of collectors' expectations without compromising artistic integrity is built through long-term relationships based on mutual respect and a deep understanding of artistic vision. As demonstrated by the available data, artists who cultivate close relationships with collectors develop the capacity to anticipate preferences without experiencing a sense of being dictated to. Collectors are not arbitrary in their requests; they must adjust to the character. When making requests, collectors are expected to adhere to the style that the artist is accustomed to creating. This mechanism establishes an environment conducive to dialogue, wherein negotiations transpire within implicitly delineated parameters, enabling artists to respond to specific requests without compromising their personal aesthetic boundaries. From the collector's perspective, a personal relationship with the artist facilitates a deeper understanding of the creative process. The collectors in this study have been granted direct access to the artists' studios through family connections. Consequently, their appreciation of the work is not solely based on the final result, but also on an understanding of the artist's creative journey.

3.3 The Influence of Artist-Collector Relationships on the Development of Artistic Strategies

The importance of studio visits and direct interaction between artists and collectors in the development of artistic strategies that result in collectors' favourite works has been well documented. The data obtained from the study indicates that collectors have direct and continuous access to artists' studios. One collector stated, *"I meet the artist more often, so my collections are directly from him, because I already know him and because his style suits me."* This direct interaction facilitates a unique co-creation process where collectors are not merely passive consumers but active participants in the creative process. The most explicit example of this phenomenon is when collectors request that artists incorporate personal elements into works that are still in progress. Upon purchasing the painting, it was evident that the work was not yet complete. Consequently, the artist was approached with a request to incorporate the subject of the painting, namely the car, into the composition. This request was accommodated by the artist, as the inclusion of the car did not result in a significant alteration to the underlying concept of the painting.

The role of curatorial dialogue and informal feedback in shaping artists' understanding of how their work is received and interpreted by collectors is of great importance. Evidence shows that art galleries serve as intermediaries, facilitating this dialogue. "Galleries serve as a channel through which our work is introduced to the public. Galleries have a proven track record in interpreting market preferences, and each gallery's unique identity is closely intertwined with their specific approach to analysing the market. The feedback artists receive from galleries is not prescriptive, but

rather informative, providing artists with insights into market reception without imposing specific changes. This information is utilised by artists in a strategic calibration process, as expressed in the following statement: “*artists care about how they adapt to current trends or developments in visual art.*” From a collector's perspective, informal dialogue with artists has been shown to deepen appreciation and create a narrative richness that enhances the emotional value of the work. Collectors have described how, whenever guests ask questions about a particular work, the personal narratives that emerge always evoke a sense of excitement, encouraging them to recount the story with renewed enthusiasm.

The long-term relationship between artists and collectors engenders a feedback loop system that facilitates organic artistic evolution while maintaining marketability. The data indicates that collectors participating in this study have amassed a collection of four to five works by the same artist over an extended period, thereby providing a comprehensive overview of the artist's stylistic evolution. This evolution encompasses a transition from monochrome to polychrome techniques, and from realistic depictions to more expressive and playful compositions. This sustained relationship fosters an environment in which artists feel empowered to engage in experimentation, knowing that their dedicated collectors comprehensively understand and appreciate the evolution of their artistic expression. The artist has stated that their work is in a constant state of evolution, and that they are dedicated to maintaining a high level of creativity in order to remain relevant in a changing cultural landscape. This commitment to adaptability is expected to be met with approval by collectors who have a profound understanding of the artist's artistic vision. From the collector's perspective, this long-term relationship also engenders an emotional investment dimension that transcends financial value. The work is esteemed not solely for its aesthetic qualities, but also for its reflection of a shared history and mutual understanding that have evolved over time.

Price negotiation as a relational aspect exerts a subtle influence on artistic strategic development. The analysis of the available data indicates that collectors who have personal relationships with artists engage in a more collaborative and less transactional negotiation process. The artist is known to be amenable to negotiation, and is therefore able to provide the required work promptly. This approach is both straightforward and challenging for the artist, but the artist in question is regarded as a pleasant individual. This flexibility in price negotiation is indicative of a mutual appreciation between artists and collectors, whereby artists value collectors who genuinely appreciate their work, and collectors value the opportunity to support artists they respect. The collector articulated a rational approach to pricing, stating, “*I adjust it to my budget and ability*”. The present collector's objective is not to resell or auction the work. This approach liberates artists from the pressure to create works that are solely driven by market forces, thereby allowing for more audacious artistic exploration.

3.4 Aesthetic Exploration as a Joint Creativity Exercise

The findings reveal that collectors' aesthetic exploration serves as a complex exercise in creativity, whereby the process of selecting and collecting artworks represents active meaning-making rather than passive consumption. Aesthetic exploration is hypothesised to commence with the formation of preferences, which are theorised to be influenced by biographical background and professional identity. This assertion is supported by data from collectors. Architect collectors participating in this study disclosed that their professional background as architects engenders a heightened level of interest in certain architectural structures, with existing buildings eliciting a stronger sense of attraction. The professional background in architecture has been shown to influence the aesthetic schema, which in turn becomes a filter for the interpretation of works of art. This has resulted in a preference for architectural realism that resonates with the collector's trained visual literacy. However, aesthetic exploration is not static; the data shows an evolution from passive inheritance to active curation based on informed personal preferences.

The collector's aesthetic exploration is also manifest in their ability to establish creative links between visual elements, historical context and personal memory. The data reveals complex 'creative clicks' in which collectors describe multidimensional connections with works: “*When we see a work, if we have no connection to it, we will only look at it briefly, but if there is a work that catches our eye, we will definitely pause there first, enjoy it first, and then ask ourselves why we are interested in it.*” This process of self-interrogation indicates that aesthetic exploration involves

metacognitive awareness, whereby collectors actively analyse the source of their attraction to a particular work. The most potent creative linkage is initiated when a work prompts the recollection of embodied memory. Collectors have described paintings featuring street artists from their childhood as catalysts for profound emotional resonance, stating that when they see such works, they are reminded of their childhood and experience a smile.

The domestication of meaning as a post-purchase phase is indicative of continuous creative co-creation, in which collectors actively construct and reconstruct the narrative significance of works in the context of their lives. The data indicates that collectors exercise refined curatorial judgment in the arrangement of works within residential environments. The placement of focal points in specific rooms is a strategic decision, as evidenced by the collector's assertion that the overcrowding of a single room can lead to viewer disorientation. This decision is indicative of a curatorial understanding of visual hierarchy and spatial dynamics, whereby collectors apply their architectural sensibilities in constructing their living environment as a curated exhibition space. The domestication of meaning is also associated with narrative performance, in which collectors repeatedly recount the story behind each artwork to guests: *"It's related to our childhood; there's something that makes us happy, When asked about the painting, we are wont to relate the story behind it with great gusto"*. This narrative performance is not merely a dissemination of information; rather, it constitutes a ritual of reinvigoration in which collectors re-experience the emotional resonance that initially attracted them to the work, thereby confirming that collecting is an ongoing creative practice rather than a completed transaction.

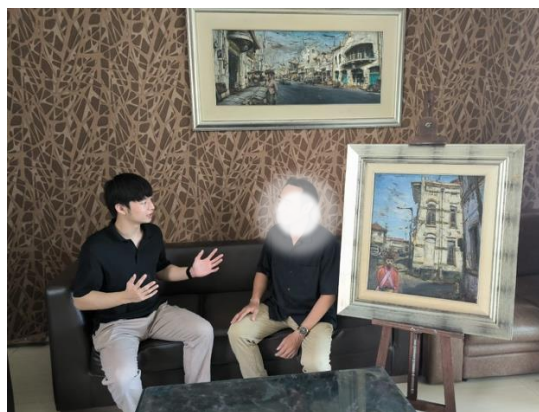


Fig. 2 . One of the Collector's Collections

CONCLUSION

The present study aims to explore how artists develop inventive strategies in creating works that resonate with collectors' preferences, the cognitive-emotional-relational mechanisms used in integrating expectations without compromising artistic integrity, and the influence of artist-collector relationships on the development of artistic strategies. The following key findings have been identified: artistic inventivity is a strategic negotiation that prioritises artistic consistency through selective creative adaptation (colour palette, thematic evolution, contextual responsiveness); integrity mechanisms are based on emotional recalibration, where works are created from authentic joy that paradoxically produces stronger resonance with collectors; and long-term relationships facilitate unique co-creation, where studio visits, curatorial dialogue and informal feedback create a dialogical space that frees artists to experiment while maintaining marketability. Theoretically, this research enhances our comprehension of creativity as a collective rather than individual phenomenon by introducing the construct of 'artistic inventivity'. This construct serves to integrate aesthetic exploration theory, embodied emotional resonance, and socio-cultural validation within a unified framework. In practical terms, the findings offer insights for emerging artists to develop strategies that balance artistic integrity with market responsiveness. They also offer insights for galleries and curators in facilitating productive dialogue that respects the creative autonomy of artists

while anticipating the preferences of sophisticated collectors who value personality and consistency in artistic quality. The findings of this study demonstrate that, within the contemporary art ecosystem, the highest value is not attributed to compliance with market demand but rather to the artist's capacity to uphold a robust and consistent artistic vision, whereby 'the more idealistic the artist, the more robust and enduring their own market'. However, this research also acknowledges that the complexity of the artist-collector-gallery dynamic in different geographical, cultural and economic contexts requires further exploration to comprehensively understand how artistic inventivity operates in a global ecosystem that is increasingly connected yet remains diverse in its aesthetic values and collecting practices.

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