

# **AN ARTIST: A CROSS-CULTURAL OR A CULTURE-SPECIFIC CATEGORY?**

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This research was supported by grants from the Social Studies and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Conseil Scientifique de L'Universite Paris 1, Pantheon-Sorbonne, France, and the National Science Council, Taiwan.

Who is an artist? How can this concept be defined? These questions, explored in Edmund Feldman's book, "The Artist," through the analysis of various types of artists that have emerged historically, have guided this study concerned with understanding of the concept of an artist in present times and across cultures. As Moulin, Passeron, Pasquier and Porto-Vasquez noted, the concept of the artist has become increasingly confused since the 19th century, the phenomenon attributed by these writers to the existence of conflicting fields within the world of art that attempt to determine the merit of artists work and their status (Moulin et al. 1985). On the one hand, the commercial art market establishes its own standards and criteria of artistic suc-

cess, and on the other, the community of artists themselves strives for self-recognition and seeks "autonomous methods of production and all kinds of strategies to gain their independence from the official institutions of contemporary art" (Fleck, 1999, p. 66). During the 20th century the legitimacy of the artist's right to self-proclamation has become particularly strongly advocated and recognized. For example, UNESCO's definition of an artist contains clauses specifying that an artist is "any person who (...) considers his artistic creation to be an essential part of his life" and "who is or asks to be recognized as an artist" (UNESCO, 1980, p.5). Clearly, such open and ambiguous criteria make the concept of an artist both fluent and imprecise.

As vague as it may be, this concept belongs to the core of constructs central to art education, as it designates the person responsible for creation of what he/she or his/her environment considers as art, an individual that our students strive to understand or impersonate in the course of their study. As Feldman noted, students are naturally interested in exploration of personalities, life histories, and social contexts in which artists created the works that became subject of students' critical examination, but they are also inquisitive about predispositions, characteristics and attributes of people who are referred to as artists. What does it take to be an artist? How one becomes an artist? Can everyone become an artist?

Our study has added another question to this list, the question especially relevant in the context of globalization trends and art education becoming increasingly multicultural, in response to changes in fabric of many societies. While it is safe to assume that some aspects of the concept of an artist likely remain stable across cultures that have invented or adopted one or more of the existing conceptions of art (e.g., artists are those who make or contribute to creation of art, whatever the term art may define), we were interested in uncovering the nature of the semantic fields that this term occupies in different cultural settings. This cross-cultural investigation has its roots in historical differences related to the emergence of the concept of the artist in the East and the West. While Chinese painting became valued in its own right and distinguished from handicraft already in the 8th century, it took almost another thousand years for such a transformation to occur in the European context. Chinese poet Wang Wei (699-759) is credited with inventing a form of mono-

chromatic ink wash painting that raised the status of painting in China beyond that of a decorative and narrative medium used to satisfy demands of the elite to a realm of intellectual and spiritual exploration. This placed painting, alongside calligraphy and poetry, in a very different category than sculpture or architecture that were considered forms of craft.

In the West, even though poets and musicians have earlier been admitted to the community of liberal artists, painters and sculptors have not enjoyed this higher status until the 17th century when Italian followed by French painters pushed for their profession to gain a higher social acclaim (Heinich, 1993). It still took centuries of symbolic, aesthetic and political action to transform painting into a category belonging to an intellectual or spiritual elite rather than that of skilled craftsmen. Throughout this time "artists" spared no efforts to distinguish themselves from the "manual labour" and emphasized their alliance with values espoused by social groups that they aspired to join. This was also a period that generated many myths about an artist's identity.

## **Purpose and design of the study**

Our study was designed to explore the relief of the semantic fields that the concept of an artist occupies in a cross-cultural context today through examination of conceptions held by young children, adolescents and adults in Canada, France and Taiwan, ROC.

Through a series of structured interviews conducted in Vancouver, Paris, and Taipei, we acquired access to a body of social knowledge that we present in this paper. The choice of the research settings reflected cultural anchoring of the researchers thus allowing for the interpretation of the collected data from "an insider" point of view in all of the sites. The study presented in this paper was a module of a large cross-cultural research undertaking concerned with various facets of social cognition of art (Darras & Kindler, 1996, 1999; Kindler & Darras, 1995, 1997, 1999; Kindler, Darras, & Kuo, 1996, 1998, 1998a, 2000).

Questions probing understandings of the concept of an artist were included in a large interview schedule integral to the research mentioned above. This specific cluster of questions included both open-ended prompts, as well as items where our respondents were asked to choose from among selected

options. Some of the questions were posed to all subjects (and in the same wording), while some prompts proved to be too complex for the youngest respondents in the pilot study and became eliminated. The segment of our study presented in this paper focused on social conceptions of "an artist" by asking our informants to elaborate on what kind of people fit the "artist" category; by inquiring about the possibility of a child to be considered an artist; and by exploring the importance of education in becoming an artist. This exploratory, descriptive study aimed at highlighting cross-cultural similarities and differences in the ways the concept of an artist functions in the Canadian, French and Taiwanese societies, within the limitations inherent to our sampling procedure and the scope of our investigation described below.

Our informants represented three age categories and two levels of art expertise. The youngest participants in our study were 4 to 5 year-old children enrolled in local educational programs designed for this age group. We have interviewed 110 such children in the three cultural contexts. In each setting, children were drawn from multiple daycares, preschools and kindergartens. However, all of our informants belonged to the upper-middle class and lived in large urban areas. This allowed us some degree of control over the social variable and lead to development of a more homogeneous data that can be used in comparative studies extending investigation to other strata of the probed populations. Each child was interviewed individually and we were pleased with children's interest and cooperation. With very few exceptions, children whom we have approached were keen on sharing their views and were able to offer us meaningful answers.

The second study group was comprised of ninety 13 to 14 year olds. These teenagers were drawn from the same populations as young children. Finally, we interviewed adults: both those with no formal art background or experience (later referred to as "art novices"), as well as teachers of art in secondary schools (referred to as "art experts"). In each of the study settings, we have obtained data from sixty individuals. In total, we interviewed 380 people.

In discussion of research results, we have used percentages rather than raw numbers to describe data patterns in order to allow for an easier comparison across the study groups. It is important to keep in mind, however, that given a relatively small sample size of each group (resulting from the

design of our study that separated variables of cultural setting and age and due to limited resources available for this project), any differences or similarities expressed in percentage terms need to be interpreted with caution. At the same time, it is also worthwhile to note that our interviewees were typically asked open-ended questions where the answers emerged spontaneously, rather than being selected from a list of suggested options. Therefore, the standard expectations of what would constitute a group consensus do not apply in this case.

## **What kind of people are artists?**

When we asked our informants "What kind of people are artists?", we were presented with a very extensive list of attributes and characteristics, including physical features, personality traits, descriptions of a lifestyle, and references to a specific status within a society. Overall, over 90 categories of descriptors emerged in the data, 43 of which were suggested by more than one individual.

While some of the descriptors or attributes of an artists have surfaced in responses across the three settings, the information gathered in this study pointed to the significant variations in the relief of the semantic fields that this term occupies in Canada, France and Taiwan. When all characteristics, attributes, and descriptors of a concept are juxtaposed, and their respective salience in defining the concept is noted, it is possible to create a general model of this concept within a three-dimensional semantic space. Our hypothesis, confirmed through this research, has been that depending on the importance accorded to each of the attributes or characteristics, the organization and relief of this semantic space will vary as a function of representation of individuals within a culture, and even more so, across cultures. We were also able to detect in this study some developmental and expertise-related variations within each of the cultural settings in responses of adolescents and adults who participated in our research (the youngest children were not presented with this interview prompt).

## **The Canadian responses**

As Table 1 illustrates, one of the most striking differences in responses of

**Table 1**  
**What kinds of people are artists?**

Categories of responses mentioned by at least two Canadian interviewees in each study group

13-14 year old		Adult art novice		Art teacher	
Creative	12 (40%)	Everyone/anyone	11 (37%)	Different kinds of people	12 (40%)
Expressive	9 (30%)	Different kinds of people	7 (23%)	Everyone/anyone	7 (23%)
Imaginative	5 (17%)	Those who look or act certain way	2 (6%)	Curious/inquisitive	6 (20%)
Open-minded	5 (17%)	Creative	2 (6%)	Open-minded	6 (20%)
Those who draw, paint, etc.	4 (13%)	Eccentric	2 (6%)	Creative	4 (13%)
Those who like art	4 (13%)	Expressive	2 (6%)	Expressive	4 (13%)
Everyone/anyone	3 (10%)	Hard working	2 (6%)	Driven	3 (10%)
Different kinds of people	2 (6%)	Reflective	2 (6%)	Risk takers	3 (10%)
Keen observers	2 (6%)			Free thinkers	2 (6%)
Reflective	2 (6%)				
Those who look or act certain way	2 (6%)				

teenagers and adults was the insistence of the older informants on an open definition of an artist, combined with belief that anyone can be considered an artist. Adults with formal art background and experience were especially adamant about the fact that it is impossible to create an image of an artist that would be comprehensive enough to define the entire category (63% of respondents). They suggested that "they (artists) can be anyone in any walk of life or any age group. Being an artist isn't a label to be a certain group, that is a stereotype. It encompasses, it goes past all the different kinds of boundaries or classifications you may have of cultures and subcultures in society." As some of our informants indicated, artists can be "all kinds of people: both genders, all races, cultures, people of all ages, religions, languages" and they "do not look, act, smell, or walk a certain way." While Canadian adults, both experts and novices tended to share the belief that the term "artist" does not designate any specific category of people, there were several attributes or characteristics of artists that were proposed by our informants with fre-

quencies indicating a degree of a group consensus. Several art teachers independently used terms "open-minded" and "curious or inquisitive," to define personality of an artist (20% each) and 13% of respondents claimed that people who are artists are concerned with and able to express their thoughts and feelings and they do so in creative ways.

The Canadian adults without art training have also supported the notion that an artist can be anyone and that this concept is defined by more than one possible image (37% and 23% of respondents, respectively). 13% of our interviewees included in their definitions of an artist references to physical appearance or a lifestyle associated with a certain "look." According to them, artists "wear black and white" and they are "bohemians," "funky people that hang out at cafes." Although from the times of Renaissance it is possible to note some eccentric and melancholic figures within the artists communities, these attributes were not common until the 19th century where the style of dress and social behaviour became heavily influenced by the romantic ideology. The kinds of stereotypes mentioned by our interviewees date back to the 19th century Paris, where the dress code has clearly distinguished between the recognized and established artists and their students. As Delecluze noted in his description of the atelier of David, famous artists were dressed in ways suggesting integration into the artistic elite, while the aspiring artists "searched for new identity experimenting with extravagant appearance" (cited in Monnier, 1991, p.153). However, at least one of our Canadian informants clearly contradicted this stereotype by saying that "artists are not the stereotypical beret wearing, black-clothed, cigarette smoking, moody person, but everyone else." Among the list of attributes mentioned independently by at least two respondents were adjectives such as "reflective," "expressive," "hard working" and "creative."

The idea that creativity is a defining attribute of an artist was strongly present in responses of the 13 -14 year olds interviewed in British Columbia (40%). According to these teenagers, artists "all have to be creative," they are "creative people" who "try different ideas that other people don't like to try." 30% our respondents in this age group also signaled the connection between artistry and expression: "they express their feelings a lot," "they like to express themselves through drawing," "they are able to express their feel-

ings in some form even if they don't tell other people", "they want to express some part of themselves," "they express their anger through art." There was also some degree of consensus over the fact that artists are imaginative and open-minded (17%), that they work with art media (e.g., they draw, paint, etc.), or that they "like art" (13% each).

In contrast to the Canadian adults, only 10% of our informants in this age group suggested that anyone could be an artist. Similarly, only 7% mentioned the possibility that the concept of an artist may be too broad to define it with a common list of attributes and characteristics. Furthermore, the fact that six different descriptors were consistently suggested in the *spontaneous* responses of at least four informants indicates the possibility that the concept of an artists invokes a rather well defined, common image for youngsters in this age group. For these teenagers, the concept of an artist is clearly associated with creativity, imagination, and open mindedness that find their expression and realization in art media, as well as with the love of art.

This was in contrast to the older informants in Canada who clearly favored an open definition and were not willing to commit themselves to conceptions that would not be all-encompassing and not allowing for "anyone" to fit the category. The characteristics most often mentioned by some art teachers as well as adult art novices as the likely attributes of artists corresponded only in a limited way to those proposed by younger respondents. This difference in adolescent and adult representations should be of interest to educators as this sort of a dissonance is bound to affect educational process and impact on the dynamics of teaching and learning. Even those descriptors that emerged in answers of informants across the three groups surfaced with different frequencies suggesting their varied importance in social conceptions of an artist held by these groups. For example, creativity as a defining characteristic of an artist was spontaneously mentioned by 40% of 13 - 14 year olds, while only 13% of art teachers and 6% of adult novices referred to it. It is possible to speculate, however, that the large number of adult answers pointing to the open definition has potentially prevented some of these individuals from specifically mentioning attributes such as creativity, even if the respondents believed it to be an important characteristic of the concept.



## The French responses

Table 2  
What kinds of people are artists?  
Categories of responses mentioned by at least two French  
interviewees in each study group

13-14 year old		Adult art novice		Art teacher	
Those who draw, paint, etc.	13 (43%)	Creative	7 (23%)	Those who draw, paint, etc.	8 (27%)
Expressive	10 (33%)	Sensitive	6 (20%)	Expressive	7 (23%)
Original, different	6 (20%)	Expressive	3 (10%)	Lifestyle	7 (23%)
Imaginative	4 (13%)	Risk takers	3 (10%)	Creative	4 (13%)
Full of ideas	4 (13%)	Concerned with beauty	2 (6%)	Curious/inquisitive	4 (13%)
Talented	3 (10%)	Imaginative	2 (6%)	Recognized	4 (13%)
Creative	2 (6%)	Passionate	2 (6%)	Witnesses of their times	3 (10%)
Different kinds of people	2 (6%)	Talented	2 (6%)	Dedicated to art	2 (6%)
People who look or act certain way	2 (6%)			Free thinkers	2 (6%)
Recognized	2 (6%)			Intense	2 (6%)
Wanting to please	2 (6%)			Reflective	2 (6%)
				Risk takers	2 (6%)
				Sensitive	2 (6%)

The most frequent references made by both French teenagers and art teachers in their attempts to define an artist related to work with artistic media or production of art (43% and 27% respectively). According to these informants, artists are those people who "make works of art," who "produce paintings," who are capable of production of art," who are involved in the production of "what we can put together under the theme of art." This category of responses was absent in the case of adult art novices, where the answers emphasized creativity and sensitivity (23% and 20%, respectively).

The one reference consistent across the three groups which emerged with marked frequency was that to expression with 33% of 13 -14 year olds, 10% of adult art novices, and 23% of art teachers including it in their answers. The following statements provided by art teachers, emphasizing both the

ability and need for expression, well illustrate this category of responses: An artist is "someone who by his way of expression, in his medium, expresses something"; "Artists have the need to externalize and express what happens inside," "to express themselves through visual or even conceptual means."

Originality, and being different from the rest of the society echoed strongly in answers of French teenagers (20%), followed by a suggestion that artists are "imaginative" people "full of ideas." 13% of art teachers included in their definitions curiosity and inquisitiveness and 27% talked about being an artist as "a way of life", rather than a collection of personality traits. In the words of these informants, artists are people "who live, who feel, who reflect, and who act." "It is a question of an internal need that makes certain people artists, simply in their way of living, in their way of being, in their attitudes toward others, towards the external world," one of our respondents revealed, while another claimed that artists share "the need to reclaim freedom and change the course of life, in any case to show a different way of perceiving the world." Some of these responses also touched the issue of commitment and dedication and the need for an artist to "dedicate himself to art, to give his body to art."

One category of responses that emerged only in interviews in France had to do with the concept of an artist being closely associated with a status accorded by some institution with the appropriate authority. This institutional argument surfaced most frequently in responses of art teachers (13%) but was also present in the answers of teenagers (6%). As one of the art teachers declared, an artist is "defined in the social plane by his integration in the cultural and financial context that defines him as an artist, from a moment when (his) artwork is exposed as a work of art and the artist is recognized as an artist, it's a museum that has an important say in the merit of an artist." The role of a museum in the status-granting process was also underscored in one of the French teenager's responses who claimed that an artist is "someone who puts his signature on works that are in museums." These views echoed claims of Nathalie Heinich that it is an institution rather than an artist who has the authority to make determination regarding the status of works of art. Heinich noted that "the work of an artist is not to say "this is art," but to make it said (to be art) by the specialists, make it be treated as art by the

agents with authority" (1998, p. 57).

Other authorities were mentioned in yet another art teacher's response who indicated that an artist "functions in a circuit, in an economy, he has its place, its merchants, his work is bought by museums, by collectors, he is recognized as an artist. If it (the work) never leaves your personal circle, if it's never publicly exposed, never sold, work that no one talks about, it's nothing, there is no work of art, such work will exist only from the moment when it becomes recognized by the circuit (of experts)." Unlike in Canada and Taiwan, the French conceptions of an artist seemed to be tied, at least to a degree, to the notion of societal recognition, institutional approval, and a status that is accorded by sources extrinsic to the artist himself or herself. This difference documents the existence of bipolar sources that govern the status of an artist in contemporary societies: an individual, with his/her right to self-proclamation and social structures and institutions that may be required to confer this standing. It also suggest that the centuries-long debate about the distinction and placement of artists within a society has not reached its final conclusion and that the question regarding the status of art and artists still remains relevant today.

## **Responses of our informants in Taiwan**

33% of the 13 and 14 year olds whom we have interviewed in Taiwan readily associated the concept of an artist with reflectivness and special ways of thinking. Several of these children claimed that artists have a "power of thought" and are able to "think in all-around way." "I think they must be people with an unusual way of thinking, and their common feature must be disinterestedness and lack of ambition," one of our young interviewees declared. The 13-14 year olds also emphasized imagination (30%), sensitivity (23%) and creativity (17%). "Artists are people who have rich imagination and creativity, and understand how to express these," one of our interviewees summarized sentiments expressed by many of her peers.

Some youngsters referred to "distinctive style" (6%) and selected comments echoed references made by our Canadian interviewees pointing to the stereotypes in artists' dress code and mannerism. "The common feature of artists is that they all have beards," one of our informants declared, while oth-

**Table 3**  
**What kinds of people are artists?**  
**Categories of responses mentioned by at least two interviewees**  
**in Taiwan in each study group**

13-14 year old		Adult art novice		Art teacher	
Thinking in unique ways <sup>10</sup>	10 (33%)	Creative	6 (20%)	Creative	15 (50%)
Imaginative	9 (30%)	Thinking in unique ways	6 (20%)	Those who draw, paint, etc.	10 (33%)
Sensitive	7 (23%)	Everyone/anyone	3 (10%)	Unique, different	7 (23%)
Creative	5 (17%)	Lifestyle	3 (10%)	Sensitive	4 (13%)
Unique, different	3 (10%)	Keen observers	3 (10%)	Keen observers	3 (10%)
Expressive	3 (10%)	Dedicated to art	2 (6%)	Dedicated to art	3 (10%)
Those who look or act certain way	2 (6%)	Expressive	2 (6%)	Different kinds of people	2 (6%)
		Passionate	2 (6%)		
		Sensitive	2 (6%)		
		Skilled	2 (6%)		
		Talented	2 (6%)		

ers insisted that artists are "weird people," suggesting the survival of this extravagant legacy of artists. Some of these children associated the concept of an artist with someone who has "a deep understanding of each work of art, a profound awareness of the work's positive meaning," or someone who "is able to appreciate art," shifting attention from skills and attitudes underlying art production to those involved in response to art.

The belief that creativity is one of the defining characteristics of an artist was also shared by the adults interviewed in Taiwan. Among the art teachers, 50% specifically eluded to creativity in their responses. They indicated that "artists have powers of original creation" and that they are "people with creativity." Additional 33% of informants in this group talked about artists as those who "specialize in artistic creation," indicating both the involvement with art media as well as the creative nature of this activity. Art teachers also noted that artists are "keenly sensitive" people (13%), that they are "good at observing things" (10%), and that they are "people with their own style who are defi-

nately devoted to artistic things" (10%).

Among adults who were art novices, reflectivness, a unique way of thinking about the world, as well as creativity topped the list of the most frequently made references (20% each). The uniqueness of artists was also emphasized in responses pointing to "innate unique style" and suggestions that artists have "stronger power of feeling than ordinary people." Some of our respondents characterized artists as "sensitive people who live in a dream world," "people who stress life experience and the activity and interaction of the spirit." It was evident that an image of an artist created by adult art novices was marked by recognition of special qualities of mind and spirit, with only two respondents allowing for the fact that "all kinds of people" can be artists.

## Can a child be considered an artist?

While in North America the term "child art" is used readily, our earlier work indicated that there are cross-cultural variations in the application of the term "art" to production of children and adolescents (e.g., Darras & Kindler, 1996; Kindler, Darras, & Kuo, 1995, 1998). In this study, one of our questions further explored the relationship between age and one's ability to be considered an artist in a cross-cultural perspective. The answers obtained from our informants ranging in age from early childhood (4-5 year olds) to adulthood indicated that interesting cultural, developmental, and expertise-related differences.

Table 4  
Can a child be considered an artist?

Age/Art Expertise	CANADA			FRANCE			TAIWAN		
	Yes	No	Other	Yes	No	Other	Yes	No	Other
4-5 year old	56%	37%	7%	45%	45%	10%	70%	30%	0%
10-14 year old	90%	0%	10%	84%	13%	3%	90%	10%	0%
Adult novice	97%	3%	0%	57%	37%	3%	60%	40%	0%
Art teacher	90%	7%	3%	17%	57%	26%	50%	50%	0%

As Table 4 illustrates, overall there was a strong support to the notion that young children can be considered artists. Especially in Canada, both adult art novices as well as art teachers expressed a great degree of consensus in response to this question (97% and 90% of affirmative responses, respectively). Similarly, Canadian teenagers readily allowed for the possibility of a child to be an artist. Interestingly, the young children themselves expressed the most hesitation in this regard, with only 56% of our young Canadian informants suggesting that a child can be an artist. Those who disagreed, claimed that children are simply "too small," or responded to the question at a very personal level saying that they were not artists.

This concern over children being "too small" was strongly shared by French preschoolers who were evenly split in their opinion (45% voting in favor, 45% against and 10% withholding their answers) and listed this as the most significant reason why a child cannot be an artist. While French teenagers approximated the responses of their peers overseas and overwhelmingly claimed that children could be considered artists (84%), only 57% of adult novices and 17% of art teachers were comfortable with this idea. The French teenagers claimed that children can be considered artists because anyone and everyone can create art (13%), age is not a factor in determining artistry (17%), children are creative (17%), can well express their feelings (17%), are talented (13%), and can make nice paintings and drawings (13%). Adults negating this possibility argued that children lack the understanding and level of intellectual maturity necessary for an artist to have (27% of art teachers and 13% of art novices). As one of these respondents remarked, "to be an artist it is on one part knowledge, power, ability to perfect technologies adapted to one's intention, to one's objectives of artistic expression and a child does not have sufficient maturity to do so." Several of our informants noted that children could not be regarded as artists because they lacked intentionality in their creative attempts (17% of art teachers and 7% of art novices). Lack of sophistication, cultural knowledge and sufficient technical skill was also mentioned, especially by art teachers.

In Taiwan, preschoolers, teenagers and adult art novices were largely in favor of the idea that a child can be considered an artist (70%, 90% and 60%, respectively), while art teachers were evenly split in their opinion (50%).

Those comfortable with the application of the term "artist" to a child mentioned children's creativity and imagination as their key rationale. The 4 and 5 year old Chinese children echoed responses of their peers in Canada arguing that children are artists because they do paint and draw. Consistently with assertions of the youngest participants of our study in Canada and France, Chinese preschoolers who were hesitant in according the status of an artist to a child claimed that children are too small to be artists, while three respondents specifically mentioned lack of technical skills. Art teachers who were not ready to call a child an artist referred to lack of maturity and life experience that an artist must possess. They also mentioned "insufficient powers of expression."

In summary, age and level of expertise have not made a significant difference in the views of our respondents in Canada. However, in Taiwan, and especially in France, the art teachers were much less likely to consider children as artists than did art novices, adolescents and young children themselves. In the case of French respondents, in particular, this difference was very dramatic leading to the conclusion that beliefs in this respect are not readily mediated and transferred from teachers to their students. It may be that at this stage in their life the students have already formed a rather stable conception of an artist and were not susceptible to their teacher's message. Alternatively, it could be posited that the actual classroom practice of French art teachers remains, at least to some extent, at disparity with their own personal beliefs.

It is important to note that the majority of the French art teachers whom we interviewed received their art and teacher education in the 1970s and that their formation was more a subject to postmodern than modern influences. The post-Duchamp heritage has left many of them convinced that the contemporary medium of art is neither painting, nor sculpture, nor collage, but rather the field of art itself. This conception is clearly a difficult one to convey to young children or early adolescents, the problem exacerbated by the lack of pedagogical tool conducive to its attainment. As Thierry de Duve (1992) noted, the project of deconstruction of art has left teachers without clear guidelines in regard to art pedagogy. The legacy of teaching for creativity and expression, overlapped with emphasis on formalism, and the more recent

focus on problem solving has resulted in incompatibility of beliefs and practice. While the problem-solving approach is pedagogically sound "it becomes misguided when applied in the context of the myth of creativity" (de Duve, p. 55). Furthermore, the French art teachers responses testified to their fondness of the institutional definition of art in determination of the status of an artist, that was evident in their comments. The French youngsters, on the other hand, tended to favor creative/expressive/original dimensions of art that are compatible with the common notions about the nature of childhood, making them ready to regard a child as an artist.

The eagerness of the interviewed Canadians to call a child an artist did not come as a surprise in the light of their choices among the metaphors that we presented our informants with to best approximate their ideas of "an artist". The list included: a teacher, a scientist, an explorer, an athlete, someone madly in love, a magician, god, and a small child. With the exception of the youngest children who favored the metaphor of a scientist, all other groups of our Canadian respondents most frequently chose "small child" as the best metaphor for an artist. This can be seen as a reflection of the strong modernist influence still present in the Canadian society that glorified children's production following the lead of some of the most prominent artists responsible for this art movement. Modernist appreciation of the artistic qualities of children's work is well illustrated in Paul Klee's quote: "Children also have artistic ability and there is wisdom in their having it. The more helpless they are, the more instructive are the examples they furnish us: and they must be preserved free of corruption from an early age." (Klee quoted in Kagan, 1993, p. 37). Canadian receptiveness of children as artists is congruent with the U-curve model of artistic development (Gardner & Winner, 1982; Gardner, 1990; Davis, 1997 ) that originated in North America and has been frequently quoted in art education literature. This model validates the notion that young children's pictorial work exhibits aesthetic qualities paralleling production of mature artists. Common everyday use of the term "art" in reference to children's paintings and drawings in Western Canada where the study took place and the child-centered philosophy that, in recent decades, has dominated Canadian education and has exercised its influence in many aspects of Canadian social life, can also account for the readiness of our Canadian



interviewees to consider children as artists.

In contrast, in the French responses, the "artist-child" metaphor remained largely absent in our informants' selections further testifying to the magnitude of the attachment to the concept of *Kunstwollen* that for many, especially in the French art education circles, is a prerequisite for art and to their attachment to institutional conceptions of art. One of the findings relevant to this interview prompt particularly worth highlighting is a cross-cultural disparity in the views of art teachers. Our results indicate that the international professional community of art educators does not necessarily converge on a common set of beliefs and values in regard to the placement of children's production within the boundaries of the world of art. On the other hand, teenagers in France, Canada and Taiwan closely approximate each others' views. It can be stipulated that this similarity may be explained by a combination of developmental factors and a possible influence of an adolescent culture that has been a subject to globalization.

### **Can someone be an artist without studying art?**

Finally, we have probed the importance of studying and learning in the process of becoming an artist. We have asked our informants whether they thought that some form of study is necessary for one to become an artist. Here, in all three cultural contexts, across all age groups and expertise levels we were presented with a view that education is not a factor that bears any significance. Our respondents, in particular adult art novices, tended to attribute artistry to innate talent, gift, or regarded is a "natural ability" (90% in Canada, 100% in France and 80% in Taiwan). These views were shared, respectively, by 87%, 84% and 87% of the interviewed art teachers in Canada, France and Taiwan and 94%, 83% and 87% of teenagers in these three settings.

Several of our respondents, in particular in France and Canada, argued that many recognized artists have never received any formal training, and that art is intuitive and instinctive. In extreme cases, arguments suggesting that "creativity cannot be learned" or even that "training can destroy creativity," were put forward. Among Canadian respondents, both art teachers and art novices, the arguments that "art is what you are feeling," or it is a form of self-

Table 5  
Can one become an artist without studying art?

Age/Art Expertise	CANADA			FRANCE			TAIWAN		
	Yes	No	Other	Yes	No	Other	Yes	No	Other
13-14 year old	94%	3%	3%	83%	17%	0%	87%	13%	0%
Adult novice	90%	10%	0%	100%	0%	0%	80%	20%	0%
Art teacher	87%	13%	0%	84%	3%	13%	87%	13%	0%

expression that is bound more to personality than any educational experience have been shared by several informants. However, in all three settings, many of our respondents qualified their responses by acknowledging that education can be helpful in further developing artistry. As one of our Canadian informants noted "training gives more skills, enhances understanding, allows to make better art."

## Discussion

Our study allowed us to attempt to create cultural profiles of social conceptions of an artist across the three settings. While these profiles share some commonalities, they also maintain distinct features that testify to manifestation of culture-specific beliefs.

In this research, creativity emerged as the single attribute of artists that at least 10% of our respondents, 13-14 year olds and adults, have spontaneously proposed in all three cultural contexts. Our respondents in Taiwan were most keen to point to creativity as a defining attribute of an artist and this answer topped the list of most frequently mentioned attributes as it surfaced in answers of 29% of informants. In France and Canada creativity ranked only third, generating 14% and 20% of consensus.

We were also able to detect some similarities in common conceptions of an artist in only two settings. For example, expression was mentioned quite often in responses of our interviewees in France and Canada (20% and 17%, respectively), while in Taiwan only 5% of respondents included it in their definitions. On the other hand, our French and Chinese informants noted that

**Table 6**  
**What kinds of people are artists?**  
**Categories of responses most often mentioned by**  
**13-14 year olds and adults in the three study settings.**

Everyone	(21%)	Those who draw, paint, etc.	(23%)	Creative	(29%)
Different kinds of people	(21%)	Expressive	(22%)	Thinking in unique ways	(18%)
Creative	(20%)	Creative	(14%)	Sensitive	(15%)
Expressive	(17%)	Sensitive	(9%)	Those who draw, paint, etc.	(7%)
Open-minded	(12%)	Recognized	(7%)	Keen observers	(7%)

artists do possess a special kind of sensitivity (14% and 10%), the attribute which has not surfaced in the Canadian responses. Similarly, this study indicated that for the French and the Chinese, there was an association between the concept of an artist and performance within art media such as painting and drawing (21% and 11%, respectively), while only 4% of the Canadians informants, all of them 13-14 year old, made references to an artists actually working with these media or producing drawings, paintings, etc.

If we were to create profiles of artists based on the social conceptions that this study has investigated, the Canadian image would be the most difficult to construct, in the sense of its broadness. Our Canadian interviewees seemed to be comfortable with the notion that artists come from many walks of life, represent a smorgasbord of personalities, characteristics and attributes. "Canadian artist" can be anyone and everyone, and no special skills, competencies, predispositions, nor authorities are needed to confer this status on an individual. Still, the Canadian conceptions of an artist favored creative and open-minded people, and those who approximated young children in their ways of perceiving and responding to the world. As we have argued earlier in this paper, the modernist legacy, with its emphasis on creativity and self-expression, the post-modern relativism marked by openness to diversity, and the child-centered social climate are likely factors exercising influence on the Canadian conceptions of an artist documented in this work. But perhaps, most importantly, the Canadian conceptions of an artist documented in this

paper reflect an understanding of the domain of art that centers around an individual who holds the right to self-determination of his/her position in relation to the art world.

The "French artist" on the other hand is an individual involved with art media who explores them for expressive purposes with creativity and sensitivity. Yet, even these characteristics are not sufficient, as the status of an artist comes from recognition by an appropriate authority and at least in the view of those with art expertise, cannot be accorded to a child. The French notion of an artist emerging from this study testifies to the conflict between the conceptions of art that emphasize factors intrinsic to an individual and those that involve social validation. Our French respondents, and in particular the interviewed art teachers, placed themselves along the middle road between these two opposing positions. They have not subscribed fully to the notion that the artistic phenomenon embodies some natural and universal properties such as curiosity, sensibility, expression and creation that artists possess but do not hold exclusive rights to; a notion that would give any individual the right to artistic self-proclamation. But neither they have fully embraced the notion that these properties are fundamentally a social construction, nor that, as Bourdieu argued "the producer of the value of a work of art is not the artist, but rather it is the field of production and the universe of its beliefs that produce the value of art as a fetish while producing the belief in the creative power of the artist" (1992, p. 318). Our French interviewees adopted positions reflective of the difficulty in reconciling these conflicting conceptions, perhaps searching for the kind of balance that Dominique Chateau eluded to in his recent text: "(...)the social definition of art consists of instances of objective dispositions (defined by the milieu and its rules ) as well as subjective predispositions. (...) the problem is in estimating at what sort of equilibrium they play" (1998, p.54) .

While the image created based on responses of our French informants emphasized active involvement in creation of art, the conception of an artist that emerged in Taiwan focused more on the attributes of mind and soul. Creativity, combined with unique ways of perceiving the world, reflectiveness, sensitivity and ability to keenly attend to the environment were seen as features distinguishing an artist from the rest of the society. These qualities are

consistent with traditional Chinese beliefs dating back to Confucius pointing to a close association between art and spirituality and acclaiming art's power to shape and reflect human character and temperament. They also echo the attachment to the importance of Yi Jing, a mystical dimension associated with art that links the artist, the audience and the natural world in unified and harmonious ways. At the same time, it is possible to detect the influence of the Western world, in particular in its modernist legacy and emphasis placed on creative, free expression.

Our study suggests that the concept on an artist is much more precisely defined in common societal beliefs in Taiwan and France than it is in Canada. In these two settings, there are some defining characteristics and attributes that seem to distinguish artists from the rest of the society, while in Canada these distinctions appear to be non-existing. This may well be a reflection of the social climate of this multicultural nation, that bears on Canadian attitudes and beliefs continuously challenged through social policies and political agendas to demonstrate openness to diversity and accommodate difference, and which translate themselves in a variety of contexts of everyday life.

It can also be argued that the results of our study reflect significantly different perspectives on the very nature of art and artistry: one that seeks understanding of the artistic phenomenon more as an intrapsychic process where the presence or absence of art can be defined at a level of an individual and does not require extrinsic validation and another, that regards public recognition as an inseparable aspect of the concept of art. The Canadian perspectives documented in our study are congruent with former, while the French responses, in particular, seem to be more aligned with the later, or perhaps situated in the space where the two conflicting views are engaged in a dynamic interplay. A parallel can be made here with a distinction made by Csikszentmihalyi (1999) in regard to different conceptions of creativity. Referring to the work of Maslow (1963), Csikszentmihail argued that one of the common approaches to creativity involves emphasis on the nature of the creative process at an intrapsychic level, where "the quality of subjective experience (...) determines whether a person is creative, not the judgment of the world" (p. 314). He contrasted this approach with his systems model that defines creativity as a phenomenon "constructed through an interaction

between producer and the audience" and stipulates that "creativity is not the product of individuals, but of social systems making judgments about individuals' products." (p. 314) The results of our study reflect perhaps a similar polarity in understanding of the concept of art across the research sites and document varying degrees of salience of these respective views in different contexts.

One of the findings of our study that may be troubling to those involved in art education is the evidence of the lack of association between studying, learning, and becoming an artist, overwhelmingly apparent in responses of our informants, across the age and expertise groups in all three cultural settings. While art education in elementary and secondary schools has for some time now been rationalized more in terms of education of art audiences than production of future artists, post-secondary institutions devoted to education of artists clearly face a challenge to justify their existence. Notwithstanding the exploratory and descriptive nature of our study and its limited scope, this research suggests that in the three sampled societies the existence of such programs does not seem to be deemed necessary to ensure new generations of artists. The notion that an innate talent or inborn sensitivity are responsible for development of an artistic personality appears to be shared and prevalent, transcending cultural boundaries. Consequently, focused efforts may be required to begin to change these social perceptions in order for the post-secondary education in visual arts to enjoy societal approval and continuing support.

Feldman's conclusion that there is more than one "kind" of an artist in a historical perspective gains an extension through this study. Notwithstanding similarities, conceptions of an artist in contemporary societies remain, at least to some extent, bound to the cultural contexts in which they have been formed. Our study began to document aspects of the semantic space that the concept of an artist occupies in Canada, France and Taiwan, highlighting some important differences in meaning. Art educators at all levels will be wise to recognize the depth and distinctiveness of the semantic fields that the term "artist" occupies in different cultural settings, especially as they venture into the era emphasizing multicultural art education and exploring globalization trends in educational enterprise. Lack of attention to these differences

can lead to perpetuation of stereotypes and flattening of rich and unique semantic reliefs that define the concept of an artist in diverse cultural milieus. It can encourage practices and initiatives reminiscent of the colonial legacy and tradition of cultural imperialism. These differences should be particularly attended to, acknowledged, and respected in the works of international organizations and societies promoting global collaboration in art education.

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