Creative Industry – Case Studies
Asking questions about barriers to growth and productivity

April 2019

Preamble

We know from reports that the Creative Industries (CI) are the fastest growing sector in the UK. It is a broad spectrum of businesses including high turnover companies such as special effects, film & TV, gaming, digital, music, performing arts, designers of all kinds - all the way to the individual artist, craftsperson and maker.

The vast majority of CI are usually small - sole operator / freelancer / or micro business (i.e. 1 - 2 members of staff). They are often the supply chain to those higher turnover industries. They are many - and not usually visible to the methods of counting `employees` through SIC codes in the UK. Often when large scale, business support funding is achieved, the reporting criteria does not recognise the economic activity of the part-time or freelancer. We are missing out on what is collectively a huge section of our economy which is seemingly not counted or valued in the current definitions and understanding of growth and productivity.

In this series of Case Studies it is smallest, micro CI businesses that I am interested in talking to.

A recent Nesta report identified that the key to support the CI sector to grow and prosper further is scale - i.e. to support those micro, SME and entrepreneurs that overwhelmingly make up the sector to scale up somehow, in order to raise productivity.

In thinking about solutions and support for this - these businesses are often left out of the methods for consultation.... I wanted to try and begin to rectify this by finding and sharing personal and unique viewpoints - in the belief that by looking at the bespoke in enough detail, a universal picture will emerge that will help to inform those who, in the end, make the decisions that create the environments that all CI work and live in.

Some South Essex Statistics

- The Thames Estuary Production Corridor (TEPC) Case for Investment states that the current CI situation is 46,000 people employed – across 16,000 businesses (avg 3 each).

- Research to support this found significant hidden activity operating out of the formally defined sector definition. Occupational analysis of workers suggests that the sector in the Estuary could be twice as large as currently estimated. Measure is based on SIC codes – freelancers / micro businesses sit outside of this – and they are approx. 44.2% of the sector.

- The report highlights that using these SIC codes only may underestimate the scale of the creative industries role in the regional (SELEP) labour market by around 79.21%.

- The importance of the creative ‘self-employment’ in CI cannot be underestimated.

Case Study One

Name:	Sorenson Grundy
Business:	Milliners
Website:	www.sorensengrundy.co.uk
Based:	Leigh on Sea

Super Brief CV
Dan Sorensen and Sarah Grundy – milliner partnership that create couture collections as well as specialising in hats for theatre (Mama Mia); film (Pirates of the Caribbean); TV (Worst Witch); and Fashion (Paul Smith)

1. **How would you describe yourself? Do you even identify as as creative Industry**

No – not sure what is meant by Creative Industry. Identifies as a craftsperson or specialist maker. Has heard the term – but if saw an event advertised as for the CI they wouldn't think it was for them and so probably wouldn't go.

2. **Do you feel like you have potential to grow? (either in size i.e. staff / or in production of product)**

Yes – but within the perameters of the high couture or commissioned work.
We have been stocked in high end shops – but the mark up either makes the end product unaffordable – or means that we have to sell at less than our time and materials cost to make the product. Each hat is hand made and takes at least 2 days to make.

Mass production is not an option – it changes our product.
Diffusion range is not currently an interest – as working really hard to make the couture work.

3. **In what way would you like to grow - where do you see the opportunities?**

Exposure to new, potential clients is the key. Getting our work seen in the right contexts.

Currently the split of our work is around 60% from London / 20% locally / 20% overseas. Would like to expand into getting orders from new parts of the UK.

4. **Where/what are the current barriers to those opportunities?**

Often people don't want to pay what the product (and your time and skill) is worth – and big film productions for example really squeeze us – even when we know they are big budget.

Exposure – need better places to showcase work and ‚get out there'

Crafts fairs are good(ish) for exposure but not for sales. People don't buy couture at fairs and not many of my clients are regulars at craft fairs – but where else is there to show in the UK? For example – I am currently in a Museum show in Basel, I've already had 2 orders and 3 price enquiries.

Paul Smith shop in London – great exposure – but we are not allowed a credit next to our work. Etsy and Not on the High St – seem like good options – but work gets copied and undercut. We tried this.

We do get credits on film and tv shows which helps within the industry – much work is passed on word of mouth. We have noticed that since moving from London this has dropped off a little as we are not in the thick of the networks and clusters any more.

When I started out, I was super hopeful about this as a way to make a living. Now I realise its a luxory to be able to do it at all, full stop. The constant hustle leaves one demoralised and less hopeful. It seems to me that if you want to make money you have to compromise on quality. We are purist and choosy and don't want to compromise on ideas and quality.

I feel like I work outside of the system – not visible – and often not credited either. Of course it's really hard for potential clients to find me.

5. **Of the above barriers - if there are more than one - what is the biggest and most pressing?**

Exposure is key – need to be more visible, more opportunities for showing off work / portfolio / pieces

Being in a place where more CI are clustered and networked – this brings clients, collaboration and work. Cockpit Arts in London is a fantastic example of how this is facilitated and works brilliantly.

Case Study Two


Name:	Simon Monk
Business:	Painter
Website:	www.simonmonk.com
Based:	Studio in Southend

Super Brief CV
Fine art painter. Works mostly to commission, usually from either overseas or in the immediate locality. He sells work directly to clients from his studio. Has a European agent and a US agent/gallery and exhibits mostly overseas.

1. **How would you describe yourself? Do you even identify as as creative Industry**

No – artists are usually classed and talked about as „not economically viable“ and so it seems like a luxury to think of myself as an industry. Identifies as an „old fashioned artist“ – he is driven by the art.

2. **Do you feel like you have potential to grow? (either in size i.e. staff / or in production of product)**

Not in staff – I don't want to be an employer. Not sure what I would ask of them to do.

In production of product – possibly – I have tried a number of things over the years.

3. **In what way would you like to grow - where do you see the opportunities?**

For example, fine art prints could work for me and be produced / sold at higher volumes. Also – once a painting is completed (works can take anything up to a year to complete) – prints would mean that that work could be reproduced, as long as it was to the right quality and standard, a number of times.

Also – greetings cards. Many of my images could work on cards or other quality merchandise.

4. **Where/what are the current barriers to those opportunities?**

I am not good at business. I'm not good at the things that make companies work. I really don't like the marketing that is required and i'm not interested enough to spend time getting better at it.

If I could meet like-minded people but who had good business skills who could take on more of that side of things I would definitely be interested to explore.

I'm a really good salesman if I get to talk to clients – so if a client comes to my studio they almost always leave having bought or commissioning something. I need the opportunity to talk directly to clients more often.

Exposure – opportunities to show work and meet prospective clients and curators.

5. **Of the above barriers - if there are more than one - what is the biggest and most pressing?**

Probably myself – I enjoy being in the studio and painting too much.

Networks – if there were connections to be made at events that I knew were going to be useful and I felt welcome and not like a fish out of water, I would go and work harder at that part.

Case Study Three

Name:	Tom Springett
Business:	Creative Metalwork
Website:	www.tomspringett.com
Based:	Southend on Sea

Super Brief CV
Designer and maker of unique and bespoke metal pieces. From theatrical props; retail displays; furniture; and architectural metalwork with clients including Liberty's, Nike, Red Bull, National Theatre, ITV and Royal Opera House.

1. **How would you describe yourself? Do you even identify as as creative Industry**

I'm a hybrid. I exist in both the commercial world where I am working to commission to shop fit – or create a bespoke stairway or something. And I am sometimes in the artworld where I am designing bespoke objects – or realising a sculpture.

I am equally comfortable in both worlds – but they do often feel separate and often have a separate language – or atmosphere to events etc.

2. **Do you feel like you have potential to grow? (either in size i.e. staff / or in production of product)**

Yes maybe. I could for example take on an apprentice or younger trainee. I would like to share the practical skills I have learned over the years with the younger generation – we are in danger of some of these skills dying out as less and less people choose to work with their hands.

With some orders I do need to work with others – either because of the scale, weight or sometimes the expertise, for example if a job requires specialist carpentry - I will ask a specialist carpenter. I am often working with skilled painters too.

Space is crucial for me. Acess to larger working spaces means that I can take on larger jobs (I have the skills and experience for this and can do it). Space is at a premium however and is hugely expensive – and space requirements do change job to job – so to invest in a large space is a big step. This is where co-op's or shared studio/industrial working spaces are really useful – being able to book in more space when you need it – and often these spaces have shared tools and industrial kit that can be rented or made accessible through membership schemes.

3. **In what way would you like to grow - where do you see the opportunities?**

As above – possibly an apprentice – the driver there would be more around the passing on of skills and trade rather than to ‚grow' my business.

I would like to grow my business by having access to more commission opportunities; more exposure for my work; and networks (both of artists and other skilled craftspeople – and possible clients).

4. **Where/what are the current barriers to those opportunities?**

Work and commissions are intermittent – it is hard to predict cash flow and be sure of income. Taking on an employee seems to be a huge responsibility in this scenario – especially when much of our industry works as freelance (like me) and can hire each other as and when needed.

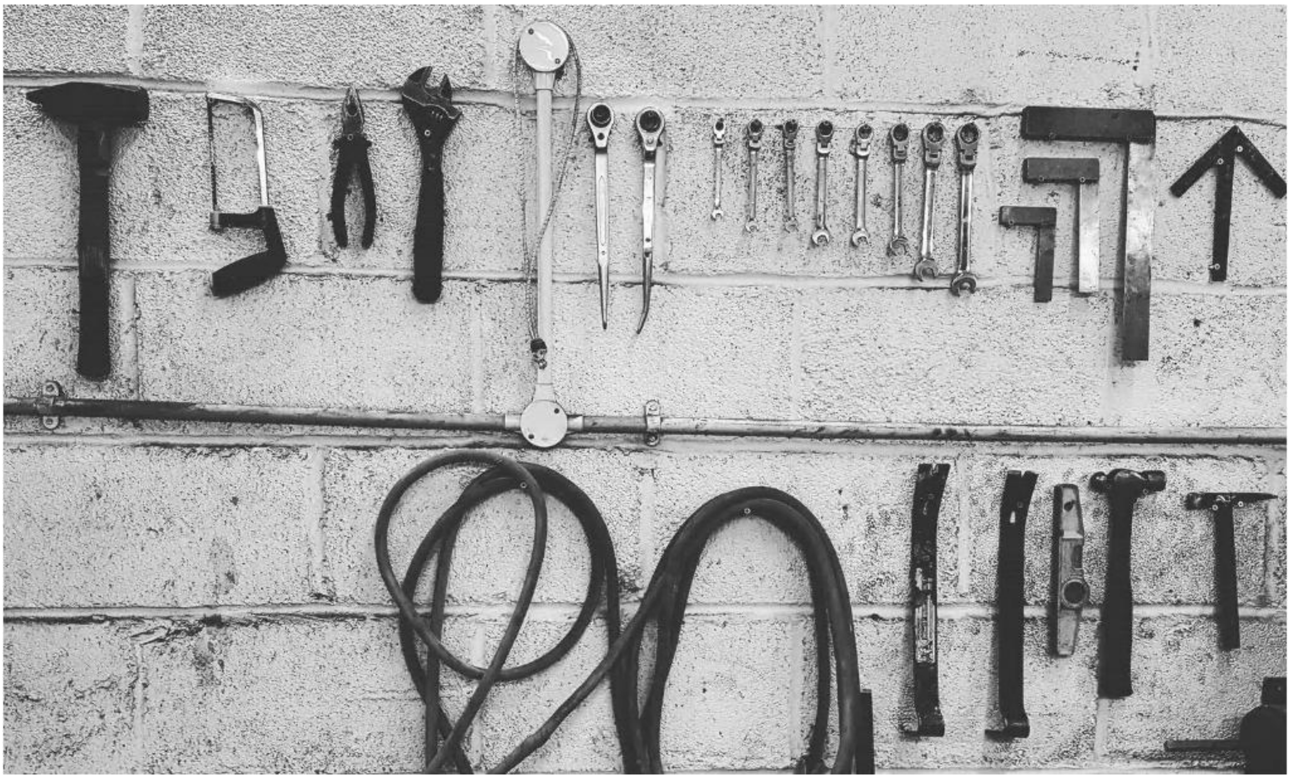
This is the way it works really – and it works really well. Perhaps this needs to be recognised, counted and valued by those who measure and count these things?

Bespoke, hand made items are costly (but worth it in my opinion) – but it is often not understood how much time and skill it takes to make something that is a one-off. It is hard to compete with the off-the-shelf, flat-pack culture and price-point.

5. **Of the above barriers - if there are more than one - what is the biggest and most pressing?**

The cost of workspace.

The visibility of us in South Essex - to each other – and to potential clients.



Case Study Four

Name: Millie Peck
Ali Eisa
Jon Kipps
Business: Individual Visual Artists
Website: www.millypeck.com
www.rupert.lt/en/ali-eisa/
www.jonkipps.co.uk/
Based: London

Super Brief CV
All individual visual artists – a mix of mid-career and established artists with a studio practice in London. They are all exhibiting regularly as well as creating work through new commissions.

1. **How would you describe yourself? Do you even identify as as creative Industry**

I always associate the term more with advertising – or those kind of industries – the more obviously lucrative ones. What I do doesn't feel like an industry.

I feel like I have strong work ethic – and work hard – but its within different perameters to how other industries/companies might measure 'productivity' and 'success'.

As well as all my art training (BA/MA) – I have also taught myself to be a skilled carpenter so I can take on practical commissions. My art studio doubles as a small production house. It also means leftover materials I can use in my sculpture.

2. **Do you feel like you have potential to grow? (either in size i.e. staff / or in production of product)**

I think about growth in terms of time. Having more time to devote to my artwork / time in my studio / time to research and visit places that feed ideas, work and knowledge – that in turn makes my work better. This time isn't necessarily spend producing immediate product – but does mean that when product comes it is much better.

I did once try to actively 'produce' more work specifically for the art market. I packaged up my work into neatly framed and buyable work for the economy. This led to conflict – both internally and with my gallery about the quality of the work – it just wasn't the same.

We have the saying 'Time is Money'. The world already thinks of time in terms of the economy. Time is of high value – to get a block of time to focus on ideas and generating work is a rare luxury but when it happens it is clear how this generates more ideas and makes the work better.

I have to ‘buy‘ time in my studio or to take time out for my practice, by working twice as long one week – to buy time the following week. Time has to be leveraged.

3. **In what way would you like to grow - where do you see the opportunities?**

Needs are so different from artist to artist – so what Jon or Milly need, might not be what I need. There isn’t just one career path for all. Personalised, bespoke and consistent relationships when talking about support for growth and development is what is needed.

Access to more opportunities – coming from networks – leading to exhibition or commission opportunities – or related educational work. Opportunities to meet / network and collaborate with people from other sectors – offering different insights, perspectives and expertise. Brokering time and skills shares across sector would be a good model.

Access to shared production facilities. For example, if I think of where all the great production facilities are in London, they are mostly in HE/FE spaces. These are closed up at night – and in holiday time. These could be opened up to artists across the city – through a membership scheme that would pay for the security to open up and insurance costs – access to great equipment in this way that you could never afford to buy on your own would be great.

Its not unusual for artists to be ‘mobilised‘ for other peoples profit. This is common practice among developers (cheap space in return for community initiatives that contribute to back-to-work schemes / training / wellbeing etc) without any real recognition of the value that that work has – or any idea of protecting it or continuing support for it once planning permission has been gained – or market values go up again – or whatever the reason might be to take the building back. This is seen as a charitable act to support us – but actually we save these people a lot of money by occupying and looking after their buildings ‘meanwhile‘. In fact we are supporting their projects with our time and expertise. Is there an opportunity to change this attitude to the value of an artists time and expertise and the language used around it?

There is a growth in Object Libraries – for loaning specialist tools etc / pooling resourses is good.

4. **Where/what are the current barriers to those opportunities?**

I feel like the gallery system in its current shape isn’t helpful to most artists. It is so driven by the relationship of the gallerist/dealer to the collector – and works take a long time to sell. For example I have sold around 6 pieces in 10 years through my gallery. Other benefits can come through the association or proximity to other good artists – but not in a very tangible way.

Perception of the arts - it would be good to change the understanding of how the work of artists who operate in the subsidised artworld actually contribute to the wider creative economy – not through money but through ideas – work is used constantly by designers / advertising / film makers / music videos etc as references, inspiration, to inform aesthetics, to shape thinking etc. This has a real economic value to those companies and to UK Plc – it‘s just never actually referenced or talked about. This in turn makes it hard for people to understand what the value of an artist is to the wider economy. It often feels awkward in some situations to call yourself an artist – you don’t know what reaction you might get.

The very practical issue of having to work on multiple other jobs. I created a list recently – and here are all the other things I do to support my practice.... Artist / curator / gallery technician / carpenter / painter decorator / mural painter / van driver/tour manager / mentor / visiting tutor / producer / graphic design / writing press releases / accounting (tax returns) / administrator.

Talking to you makes me think that one barrier is us not necessarily understanding our own political landscape very well – where the decisions are made and how to influence them. Political education for artists would be good – e.g. there have been attempts to unionise artists to give them a greater voice....

Cost of living – rent and studio space – its often a choice between one or the other.

5. **Of the above barriers - if there are more than one - what is the biggest and most pressing?**

Probably cost of living / workspace - and the attitudes that foster the lack of understanding of the value and place of an artist to the wider society and economy.