

2021

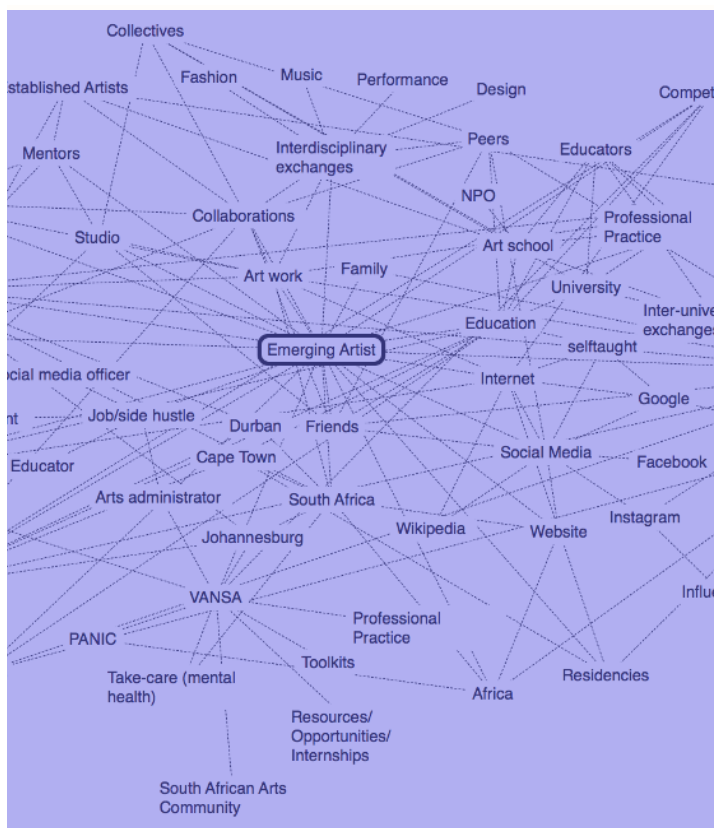
# (NET)WORKING ARTISTS

notes on how networks  
support the development of emerging  
artists' careers

ANDANI  
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South African Arts  
Community



# (NET)WORKING ARTISTS

## Notes on the research:

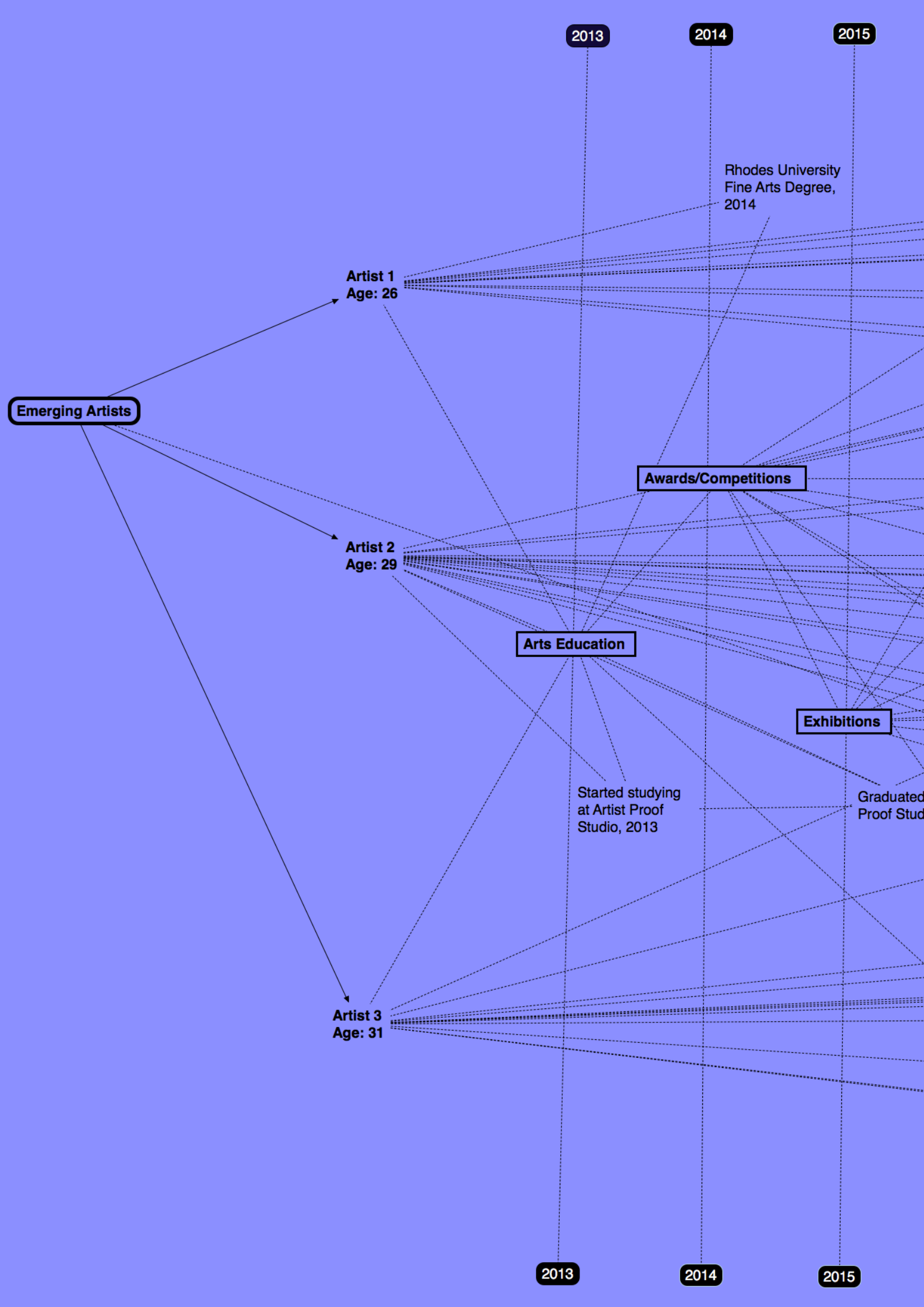
This guide/study was compiled by Andani.Africa and funded by the Turbine Art Fair (TAF). The guide condensed version of a detailed report that combined the findings of desktop research and a series of informal interviews with young artists and other arts industry actors and a think tank session with established and emerging artists representing the local contemporary art industry, from arts educators to gallerists in Johannesburg.

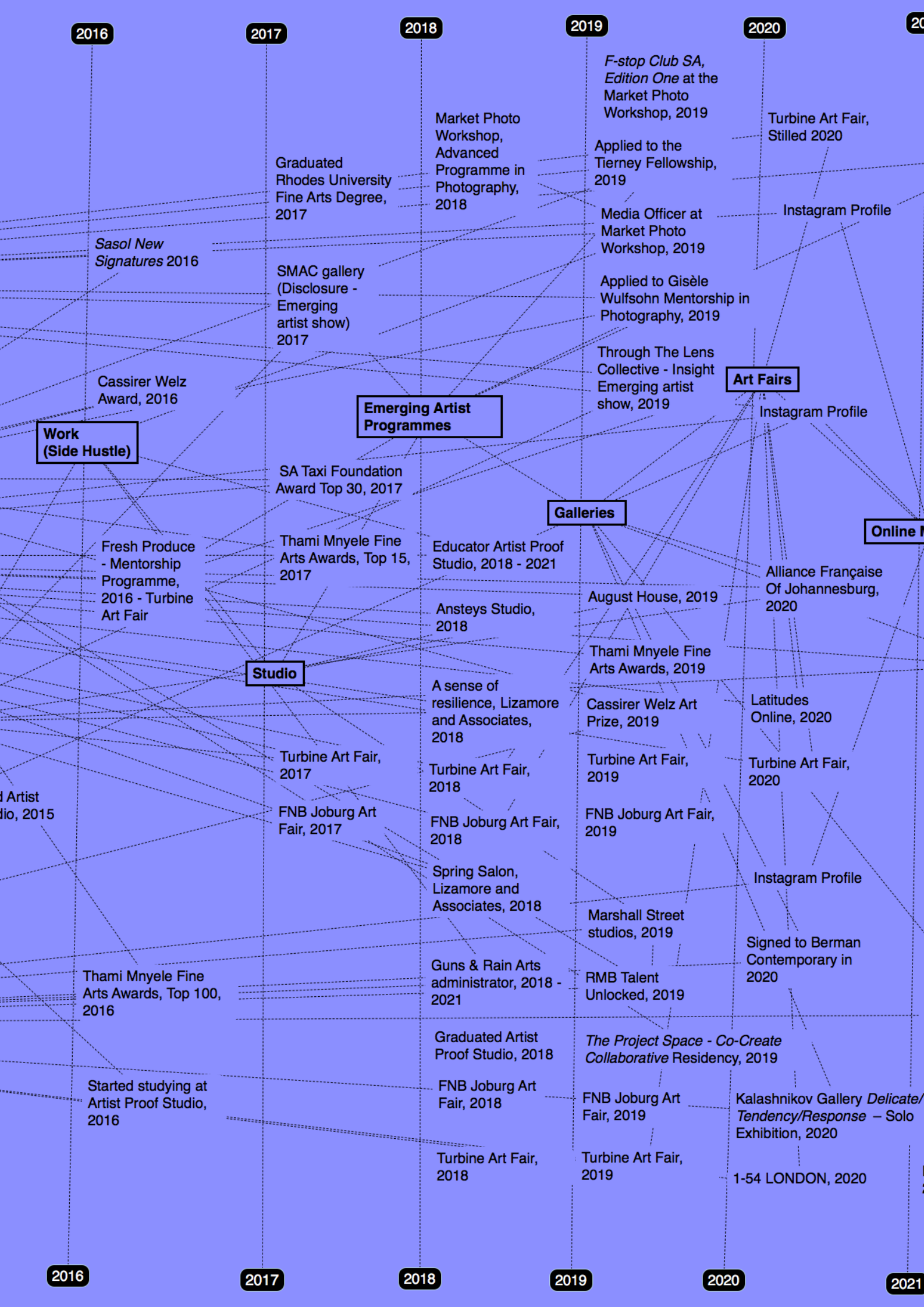
## INTRODUCTION

Talking about networks in the contemporary arts can be an awkward thing. It's often assumed to happen organically and without premeditation, a 'happy coincidence' that flows from the 'natural' engagements and social interactions that are integral to being an artist. But when networks and networking are observed more closely, the vital role they play in the development of an artists career becomes very clear and as such, becomes an important arena to understand for young artists looking to grow their careers. Furthermore, the inherent obstacles to network building, from class to language to educational access, point to the fact that 'natural' and 'organic' network building are more readily available to a select few.

This means that there is a lot of value in enabling transparency and support to emerging and younger artists to grasp and drive strategies for network building to level the playing field and more readily open up opportunities. This is perhaps ever more urgent since the seismic disruptions of the Covid19 pandemic, particularly to more established ways of connecting, meeting people and operating within a highly socialised industry.

This document looks to serve as a small window into an otherwise relatively opaque arena, to give young and emerging artists tips, nudges and possible crib notes – to support growing careers.





# SOME CONCEPTS THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND ABOUT NETWORKING:

## Capital

To understand the complexity of the artists network we need to understand the social, cultural and economic capital which drives these network associations. While economic capital is vital within the sector, Social and Cultural Capital repeatedly came up as the most accessible form of capital to build, and as the most influential form of capital across the arts community in broad (ie. It most directly leads to other forms of capital or enables access/connections to other forms of capital). Economic capital, for example, requires assets and wealth in order to wield that capital. Social capital requires relationships and the (tacit) meaning that emerges from those relationships (association).

Social Capital is also the social structure which benefits and puts into effect the desired trajectory of the individual within a particular social structure. In a study by Seibert, Kraimer & Linden (2001) respondents defined social capital in the workplace as people who "have acted to help your career by speaking on your behalf, providing you with information, career opportunities, advice or psychological support or with whom you have regularly spoken regarding difficulties at work, alternative job opportunities, or long-term career goals" (Seibert, Kraimer & Linden 2001, p.226). These similarly can be applied to the emerging artist network. Social capital in the arts as defined by Abbing (2002) refers to "the present and potential resources that arise from a network of social relations.

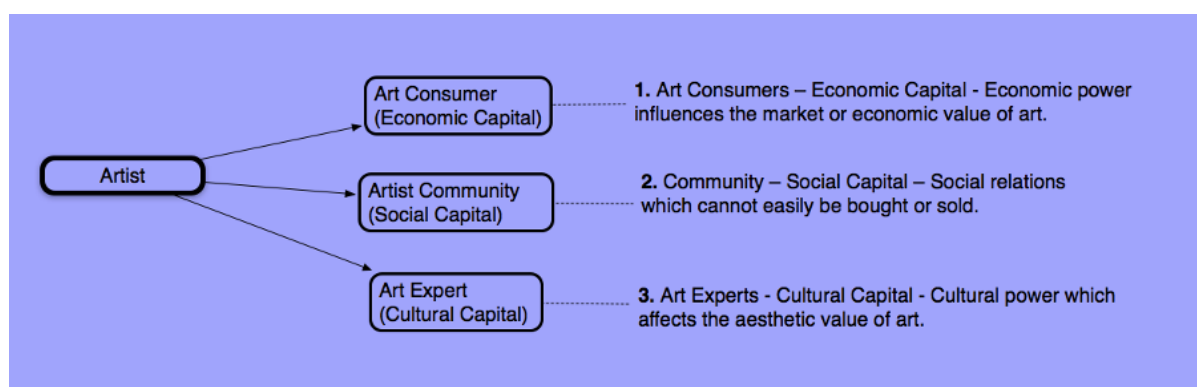


Figure 3: Examples of some of the sites of social, cultural and economic capital for an artist



In the 1970s Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, developed the idea of cultural capital as a framework for explaining some of the more nuanced and tacit forms of influence that exist between human beings and especially within classes. This capital is often informed or accompanied by economic capital but is associated with knowledge, taste and customs much more than with assets themselves. The arts have long been held as markers of cultural capital – such as going to the opera or being a patron of the arts. In more mainstream culture, celebrity is a distinct result of cultural capital. Within the arts, cultural capital also plays out within the nuances of different hierarchies of the arts – what might be considered as popular art or high art etc.

Reputations often symbolise the possession of social and cultural capital. Unlike economic capital, social and cultural capital cannot easily be exchanged or bought and sold” (Abbing, 2002, p.65). The potential capital of an artist lies in the power of their relationships, networks and associations. “In the arts, cultural capital and social capital are important sources of power” (Abbing, 2002, p.275).

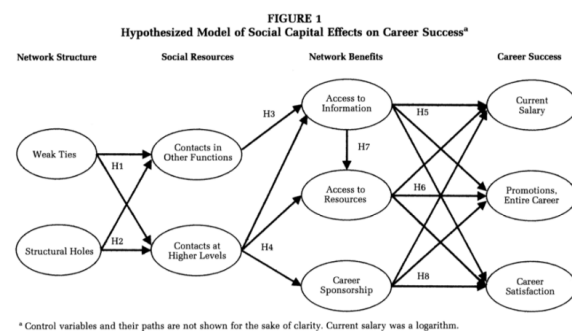


Figure 4: Seibert, Kraimer & Linden (2001) A Social Capital Theory of Career Success

## Tacit Knowledge

Generally, when discussing career progression within the arts – and this was much the case in our interviews – people quite comfortably point to sales, exhibitions, gallery representation and awards. What isn’t overtly discussed, but was subtly was the intangible knowledge that enables all these more overt and visible progression points. How one comes to be represented by a gallery, or has their work exhibited. These are career progression elements that one doesn’t necessarily learn when studying art or even attending professional practice workshops. Rather they are attained and gained through what could be describe as ‘tacit knowledge’.

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**"Informal learning is a significant aspect of our learning experience. Formal education no longer comprises the majority of our learning. Learning now occurs in a variety of ways—through communities of practice, personal networks, and through completion of work-related tasks."**  
(Siemans, 2005, p.2).

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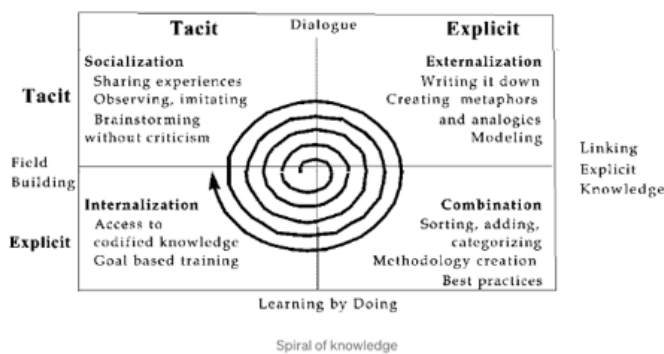


Figure 7: Nonaka &amp; Takeuchi's (1995) Spiral of Knowledge

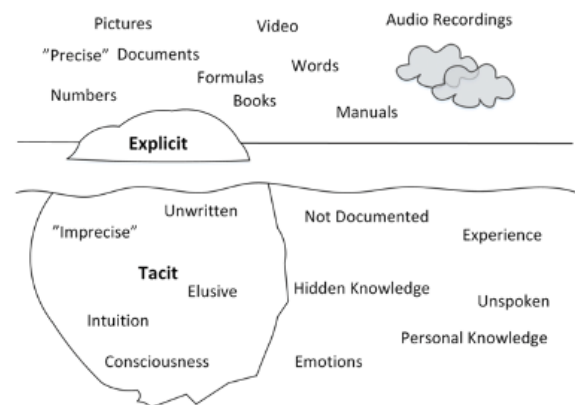
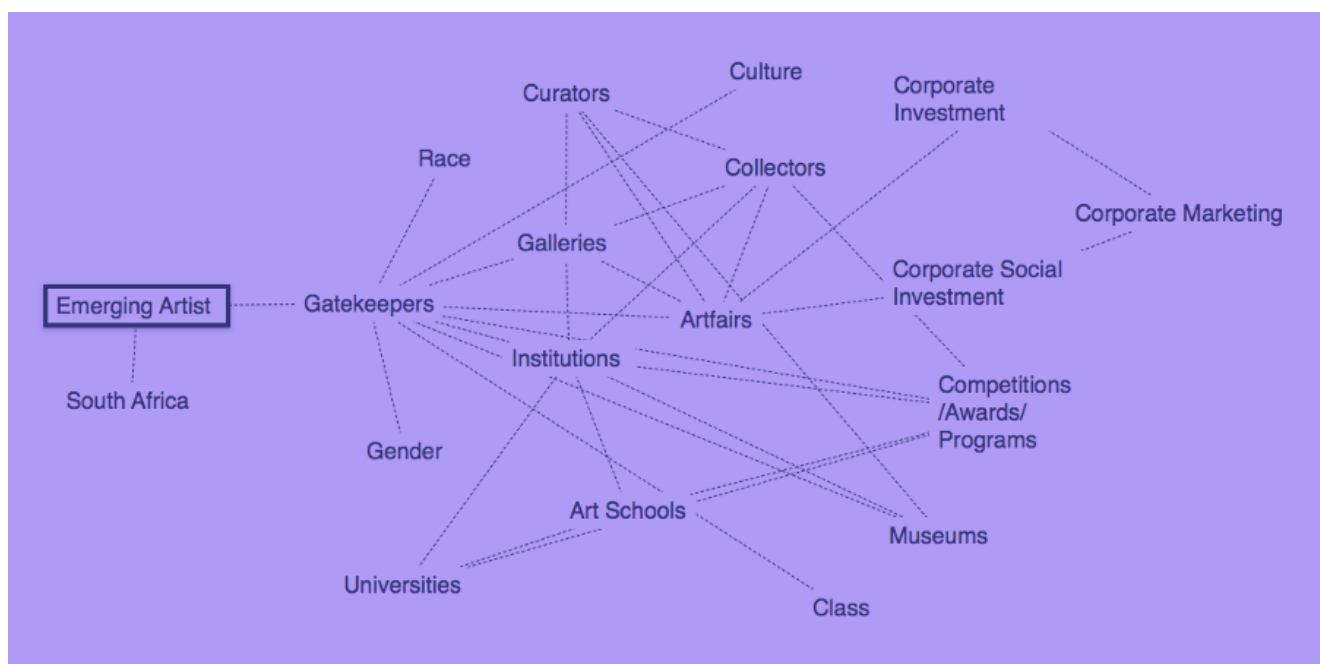


Figure 8: Wikström (2015) Explicit vs. Tacit Knowledge

'Tacit knowledge' can be hard to articulate and share as it is knowledge that is gained from personal embodied experience that is 'felt' which is "reinforced through trust, social familiarity, institutional coherence and sense of local belonging" (Grabher 2004, p.106) and often goes undocumented. Tacit knowledge is often obtained through 'know who' as much as 'know how', suggesting the importance of networking, personal presence and connection (Grabher, 2002).

**One important dimension of the way knowledge and expertise is developed is related to 'tacit knowledge'. Tacit knowledge is sticky (often linked to a person or a place/organisation) and learning cannot happen in a codified way (through a manual or an explanation), needing to be transferred through practice, observation, doing or sharing. (Comunian, 2015, p.55).**

By comparison 'Explicit knowledge' is documented knowledge. It is easily sharable, can easily be codified, documented, transformed and conveyed in systematic way. It is goal based – you can set targets and directly ensure you achieve them such as learning to play an instrument or a specific printmaking technique. Much of how we build our knowledge base as we become professionals moves between the space of tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). But part of how we might make tacit knowledge more accessible and enable the building of networks is by shifting some of its elements into the arena of explicit knowledge.



## SOME CONCEPTS THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND ABOUT NETWORKING:

### Where networks come from

1.

**Peer to Peer Networks:** Peer to peer networks were mentioned to have held the most importance of the different groups of personal networks. These networks were how friendships were established based on similarities of practice, values, experience, and personal and collective enquiries. These are established in learning spaces, at shared studios and through connecting with artists working in similar arenas or thematic.

2.

**Ties to institutions of learning:** Many artists spoke of the influence of networks through retaining connection to a place of learning through exhibitions, former trainers/educators, programmes, and meeting with old classmates etc. This enables being visible, kept in mind for projects, and available for opportunities.



3.

**Work connections:** Formal work (often not as an artist but within the arts sector) builds professional relationships through work opportunities. This enables developing artists to build credibility, visibility, and skills.

4.

**Online Marketing Platforms:** Particularly since the changes brought about by the Covid19 pandemic, the space of social media has been vital for growth in networking strategies for developing artists. Digital platforms enable growth of peer to peer networks first and foremost, but also enable visibility and reputation with a broader network of people including curators and collectors. A number of artists also spoke of increased sales via digital platforms. However, the reputational impact of social media was seen as most important.

5.

**Exhibitions, Competitions and awards incl.**

**fairs and galleries:** Our research indicated a strong presence of competitions and awards in the trajectory of developing artists – often artists won awards in competitions only on a third or fourth attempt. Similarly, participation in group exhibitions over time led to successive growth and development into more recognised and networked spaces. Part of the value of these spaces includes the social connections and impromptu engagements that happen in these gathering spaces.

6.

**Mentorship programmes:** In the group's experience it was understood that successful mentorships were based on clear expectations by both the mentee and mentor. In successful mentorship relationships these enable professional association, growing networks, direct and purposeful connections with relevant galleries and other institutions or influential individuals, and sharing of tacit knowledge.

How to make the best of a mentorship	How to be a better mentor
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Whether choosing a mentor or given one, learn about your mentor and identify their most applicable capacities for you</li> <li>Set achievable goals with your mentor of what you would like to achieve during your mentorship.</li> <li>Be clear and respectful of your mentors time commitments, how often and for how long they can meet.</li> <li>Prepare for mentor meetings with questions or curiosities you would like to unpack and better understand</li> <li>Learn to give and receive feedback</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be clear and realistic about time commitments and mentorship expectations: Be clear about how, when and how often you connect</li> <li>Set achievable mentorship goals that are tailored to your mentees needs and objectives</li> <li>Ask questions and listen more than you talk. Deep listening is a skill and a discipline.</li> <li>Share your network: this can be one of the most impactful roles of a mentor</li> <li>Learn to give and receive feedback</li> </ol>

# MAP YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES

**Use these 6 areas above and map your own career experience in relation to each of them. What have been important moments for you in each of these areas – some of them you may not have reached yet, some may not be relevant for you.**

- Where do you see gaps?
- Are there any areas that stick out for you as potential strategies you might be interested in undertaking next?
- What could be some small steps to gaining your next important career experience? Do you need to chat with someone more knowledgeable? Apply for more opportunities?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings visible.

## Characteristics that enable strong network building

7.

**Visibility:** Enabling a certain level of professional visibility is vital for network and reputation building. Being visible was acknowledged as being an important aspect within the development of an artist's career. Having others recognise your face, your voice and work supports securing sales, opens up opportunities (funding/collaborations/projects) and fosters relationships new and old. Being visible (attending exhibitions and art fairs) was described as difficult for most in the group, but all acknowledged it played a part in establishing and nurturing networks in the development of one's career.

8.

**Consistency:** Being consistent in your progress. This can be done through learning and engaging within your arts community. Social media serves as a potential platform to demonstrate consistency by regularly posting activity, action and professional engagement.

9.

**Chance encounters:** Due to the tacit and informal nature of much networking in the contemporary arts, much of network building happens in informal spaces and chance encounters. This is also informed by the social nature of exhibition openings, art fair encounters etc. Artists therefore need to be well poised to take advantage of opportunities and grow the capacity to convert chance encounter into longer term engagements.

10.

### Navigating Hierarchies and Power

**Dynamics:** Arts networks will always exist within a superstructure of hierarchies and power dynamics. Strategies can however be developed to counter these hierarchies and enable them to shift. Hierarchies as Stephenson (1998) suggest below are "designed structures", cultural social structures which obtain power through dominate similarities or differences. We need to understand how and in what ways voices are being silenced or allowed to rise in different spaces and how they can be made to be more accessible and inclusive. A tacit understanding is needed in order to unpack the viewpoints of emerging artist and others when entering into spaces like Art Fairs and galleries.

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**A network is the most natural (and most ancient) form of grouping. Its cultural complement is found in hierarchies...If networks are natural, hierarchies are cultural... Hierarchies are visibly and beautifully designed structures for incremental change; invisible networks for rapid, radical transformation. (Stephenson, 1998, p.3).**

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11.

**Experimentation and Play:** Online practice has enabled some freedom for artists, art communities and collectors to operate outside of the existing hierarchies. These are not necessarily alternatives to the formal systems but rather expansions and additions in aid of artists.

## Navigating the art scene

12.

**Spaces which elicit trust and growth:** Many practitioners foster long lasting and nurturing networks. These networks and associations were all fostered in spaces which the artists felt supported, challenged, acknowledged and heard, such as workshops, mentorship, residencies, studios, schools etc. The group spoke warmly of these experiences in which there was an openness, and willingness in which to be themselves. These are networks seen as foundational, and from which other networks could be built.

13.

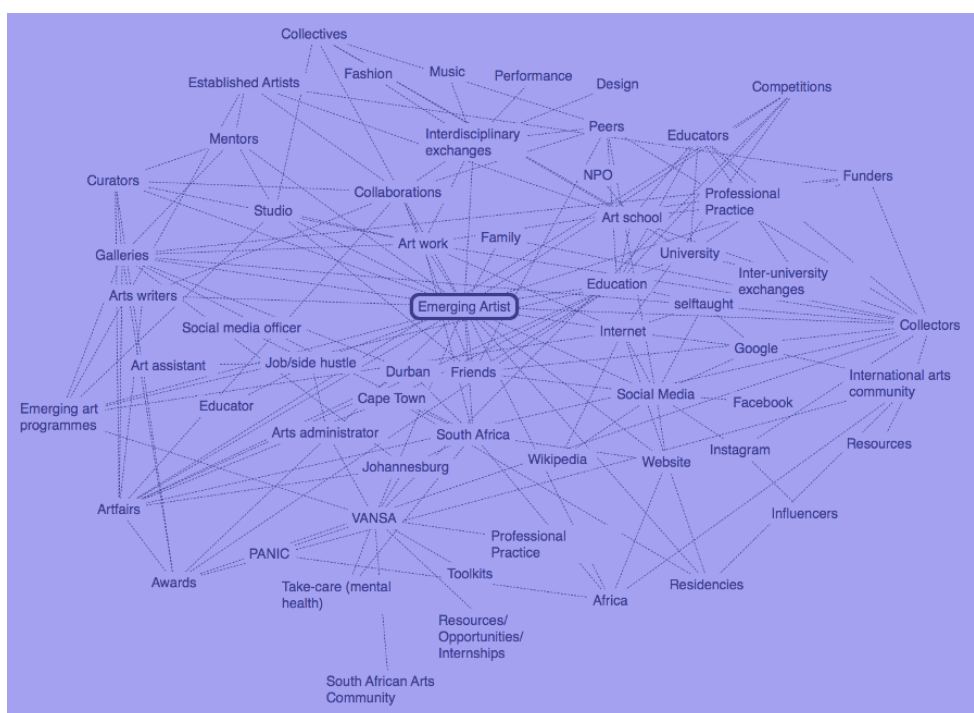
**Education and audience building:** There is a broader need for the development of audiences and buyers to create a network of enablers and financial support for artists. Network building is therefore in part an interdependent process of audience building.

14.

**Equal access to knowledge and opportunities:** There is a need for greater equity in enabling networks. Networks enable privileged access to information, whether it be based on acceptance into various programmes, access to resources (such internet), and biases privileging education, language, and visual literacy.

15.

**Community/Collaboration and Support:**  
Collaboration across creatives enables sharing of knowledge sets, methodologies and resources. Networks built to enable this strengthen artists abilities. A need was expressed across the group to foster a sharing of varied perspectives amongst the arts sector.



# WHAT DO THESE TERMS MEAN FOR YOU?

**Consider the five characteristics that enable network building. Some of them you may feel very confident in, some may not be relevant for you.**

- Are any of these terms potential areas of development for you in your career?
- What could be small steps to strengthen your abilities in this area?
- In which areas would you need support?

**What about navigating the art scene? Many of these elements stem from structural needs in the contemporary arts.**

- Do any of these structural limitations stand out for you?
- What are some small steps towards addressing these?
- In what ways can artists shift or create new pathways?

A series of horizontal lines of varying lengths, creating a staircase effect. The lines are arranged in a descending sequence from top-left to bottom-right, with each line being shorter than the one above it. The lines are black and set against a white background.

# RESOURCES

Visual Arts Network of South Africa: [www.vansa.co.za](http://www.vansa.co.za)

Art Map of South Africa: [www.artmap.co.za](http://www.artmap.co.za)

PAN!C: <https://panicplatform.net/>

Unframed Podcast: [www.unframedpodcast.com](http://www.unframedpodcast.com)

Bubblegum Club: [www.bubblegumclub.co.za/opportunities/](http://www.bubblegumclub.co.za/opportunities/)

Between 10and5: [www.10and5.com](http://www.10and5.com)

Art Throb: [www.artthrob.co.za](http://www.artthrob.co.za)

Art Times: [www.arttimes.co.za](http://www.arttimes.co.za)

Creative Nestlings: [www.facebook.com/creativenestlings](http://www.facebook.com/creativenestlings)

Contemporary And: [www.contemporaryand.com](http://www.contemporaryand.com)

Art & Education: [www.artandeducation.net](http://www.artandeducation.net)

Art 21: [www.art21.org](http://www.art21.org)

# CREDITS



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