



## “I AM NOT AN ARTIST, I MAKE ART”: AMATEURISH ARTISTS IN ISRAEL AND THE SENSE OF CREATIVITY

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**Abstract.** This study deals with self-taught visual artists who are considered “amateurish” by the establishment of the Memorial Center in Kiryat Tiv’on, Israel, where they have exhibit their artwork. We will try to figure out both the explicit and implicit characteristics of “amateurish” artists, and challenge the supposed linkage between amateurism and lack of creativity. The methodology applied combines a sociological point of view, drawing on in-depth interviews with the artists, along with a visual analysis of the artwork produced. The theory of “modest” artists, by Marie Buscatto, and the theory of serious leisure perspective by Robert A. Stebbins, will contribute supportive classifications and categories for the analysis. We claim that the artists of our study are located on an axis between “amateurish” and “professional” within a fluid area of “serious leisure”. They are regarded as “amateurish” due to their lack of academic background in the arts, their relatively old age, having encountered lack of official recognition, having come across various obstacles in displaying their art and having received low remunerations. Aside from their marginal position in the art field, we were able to detect a few characteristics that distinguish their artwork from that of “professionals”. Our findings prove them to constitute an in-between category of “modest” or “serious-leisure-amateurish” artists, which blurs the dichotomy between “amateurish” and “professional” artists imposed by the establishment. We found these “modest” artists’ experiences to be creative, as well as some of their artwork; nevertheless, this kind of creativity seems to be disregarded by the establishment which perceives creativity as innovation.

**Keywords:** amateurish art, amateurish artist, art field, creativity, professional artist, visual art, serious leisure.

### Introduction

This study deals with self-taught visual artists who are considered “amateurish” by the establishment of the Memorial Center (MC) in Kiryat Tiv’on, where they have exhibit their artwork over the past eight years. A central interest of our study focuses on the definitions of artists and the boundaries of the field of visual art. As Howard S. Becker explains, this has

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been a crucial issue in Western culture since the Renaissance (1982, p. 15). We will try to figure out both the explicit and implicit characteristics of “amateurish” artists, as well as finding out whether “amateurish” artists make “amateurish” art and whether these definitions are related to the essence of creativity. The methodology applied by us combines a sociological point of view, drawing on in-depth interviews with the artists, along with a visual analysis of their artwork. The theory of “modest” artists, by Buscatto (2017), and the theory of serious leisure perspective (SLP) by Stebbins (2015), will contribute supportive classifications and categories for the analysis. We would like to claim that the artists of our study are located on the axis between “amateurish” and “professional” within a fluid area of “serious leisure”. They are regarded as “amateurish” due to their lack of academic background in the arts, having reached their artistic occupation late in their lives, having encountered lack of official recognition, having come across various obstacles in displaying their art and having received low remunerations as productive artists. Aside from their marginal position in the art field, we were able to detect a few characteristics that distinguish their artwork from that of “professionals” although we were able to trace other characteristics, definitely placing them close to professionals. Our findings prove them to constitute an in-between category of “modest” or “serious-leisure-amateurish” artists, which blurs the dichotomy between “amateurish” and “professional” artists imposed by the establishment.

The occurrence of “amateurish” art is noticeable in the visual arts everywhere in the country (and in other countries) with local, usually peripheral galleries exhibiting art in similar conditions to those discussed in our article. Nevertheless, there have been no studies investigating this kind of artists, nor their art. This is the first academic attempt to explore such a subject matter in the Israeli art world. The only related subject studied recently was outsider art in Israel, an exhibition followed by a catalog collecting different kinds of outsider artists and their art (Direktor, 2013). While this endeavor contributed to the discourse probing the boundaries of the artistic establishment, it did not deal profoundly with the phenomenon of “amateurish” artists.

## 1. A theoretical framework

Our study embraces a sociological perspective perceiving the artwork not as a product of the artist’s genius but rather as an outcome of a web of interactions, woven between various agents: art dealers, curators, galleries, critics, research, rewards, *etc.* (Bourdieu, 2005, pp. 193–194; Trajtenberg, 2002, p. 9; Becker, 1982, pp. 34–36). We accept Pierre Bourdieu’s perception of the field of art as preserving an essential capital, constituting its unique authority (2005, pp. 113–114). Bourdieu claims that each field has its own rules and regulations within which groups of interests, individuals and institutions are constantly competing over a common object of struggle. Those who rule over the field possess the power to turn a specific object, in our case an artwork, into a valuable one (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 184) and will also act suspiciously towards new players in the field who might jeopardize the status of their snug establishment.

The artists we examine are considered “unprofessional” or “amateurish” by the establishment since they are missing three main characteristics of professionalism in regards to visual arts: they lack an academic degree in the arts, they have not contributed significantly to the

art world of Israel and they do not make a living out of their art. Moreover, professional gatekeepers often control artistic legitimacy, artistic taste and cultural trends, which effectively draws the line between "professional" and "amateurish" domains (Deener, 2009, p. 171). However, we feel uncomfortable to simply define them as "amateurish" since they dedicate most of their time to art, are committed to an everyday schedule centralized in artistic activities, are highly motivated to make art and to exhibit their art, perceive themselves as more than amateurish and in fact, their artwork many times reaches the level of what is considered "good" or "professional" art. In his philosophical theory on aesthetics, Hans-Georg Gadamer focuses on the essence of an artwork. He claims for the sovereignty of the image over its creator, and the potential of an image to capture the observer as "good" art:

"Artistic creating itself is not something that one does [...] and the process of creating will also not be the thing that is repeated again later in one's experiencing of the work. 'It comes forth' and 'it is something in the work'. But what came forth and how it came forth cannot be said in words" (Gadamer, 2006, p. 75).

Gadamer's theory is important to our study since we claim that often "amateurish" artists will be precluded from showing their artwork, even if it is "good" art. In this study we would try to challenge the definition of "good" art by analyzing the art of the so-called "amateurish" artists, a concept hardly studied so far (Schor, 2001).

Our research study relies on two theoretical frameworks, challenging them while at the same time posing a critical approach; the first one is "modesty" taken from Buscatto, but only partially (2017, p. 2). The artists we examine fit her definition in their age ("getting old as an artist"), in the objective difficulties they are facing while looking for opportunities to exhibit their art, and in the way they lack professional recognition. In contrast to Buscatto's "modest" artists who encounter difficulties in making a living out of art as the dominant element of their lives, the artists we examine do not expect to make a living from their art. Moreover, they can usually afford to spend money on the process of making art, while sometimes view it as an expensive hobby.

Buscatto's "modest" artists imply a certain degree of professionalism that we embrace in researching our "amateurish" artists through their experiences and through the analysis of their artwork. Aside from the concept of "modesty", we examine both the artists and the phenomenon in focus through the SLP, already identified in the field of sociology as a formally grounded theory (Stebbins, 2015, p. xi). While this theory includes three sub-categories (serious, casual and project-based leisure), we only refer to serious leisure as our framework in this study. Stebbins defines serious leisure as

"the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity, sufficiently interesting and fulfilling in nature for the participant to find a career there, acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge and experience" (2015, p. xx).

In our study, we detect the characteristics of our participants within the SLP, focusing both on their perceptions and on our observations. These amateurish artists, taken from the SLP, will be termed by our study as both "modest" and "serious-leisure-amateurish" artists. We ask whether there is a connection between our artists and the "romantic order" term, suggested by Hans Abbing, to explain artists' motivation to create art in spite of under-compensated circumstances (2004, pp. 2–3). We pay attention to such principles as free

time and commitment (Stebbins, 2015, p. 2), motivation, fulfillment and disappointment (Stebbins, 2015, p. 13), personal/social rewarding (Stebbins, 2015, p. 14) and the professional-amateur-public triangle which constructs the social meaning of serious leisure, again with the replacement of “amateurish” with “serious-leisure-amateurish” (Stebbins, 2015, pp. 6–7). Regarding the field of art, which is public-centered, the professional-amateur-public model seems to offer the most valid explanation for the related social structure. Our study will thus use this model to examine both the lives and the art making of the participant artists.

We will try to draw a profile of what is considered “amateurish” art, based on the conventions dictated by the establishment together with contemporary trends and tastes, within the field of art. The term “creativity” will also be addressed in analyzing the interviews with the artists in order to figure out their perception of it. Creativity will be examined also while looking at their artworks as it seems relevant to the discourse regarding the distinction between what is considered “amateurish” and “professional”. Three aspects of the art will be explored: theme – the construction of an interesting idea or narrative; style – the creation of a coherent formalistic manner; and technique – the quality of the use of materials or media. The concept of creativity will be examined in relation to all three aspects.

We would like to point out that the definition of “outsider art” as made by “outsider artists” which could seem appropriate for our study since it refers to self-taught artists, was actually found unsatisfactory. Outsider art is defined as art that “[...] is produced by individuals who recoil from the notion of art being necessarily a publicly defined activity with communally recognized standards” (Cardinal, 2009, p. 1459), and “ignores tradition and academic criteria [...] it diverges radically from our shared cultural expectations” (Cardinal, 2009, p. 1461). These components do not coincide with our self-taught artists. As for the theory of “institutional critique”, exposing the extra-artistic power relations as generators of processes and moves in the artistic world, we are well aware of its principles; nevertheless, it has been ruled out as less suitable for discussing the questions raised in the current study. Issues of selection of exhibiting artists, display decisions and determination of artistic taste (Fraser, 2005) framing the theory of institutional critique are optional for a further research.

## 2. Creativity in regards to “amateurish” and “professional” art

If we were to point to a single idea associated mostly with the notion of art, one which distinguishes art from other human endeavors, creativity would be the one (Edmonds & Candy, 2002). Whether it derives from romantic ideals of spontaneous creation, liberated from institutional restrictions, or rooted in capitalist ideas of innovation and acceleration, artistic expression has always been perceived as based on creativity as its sole *raison d'être* (Wilf, 2012). Yet, as central as it may seem for artistic practice, as well as for the on-going discourse about art, the appeal related to creativity stands in stark opposition to its sense of clarity. Indeed, it is the ambiguity embedded in it that makes creativity such a useful and acceptable idea. And since art is integrated into the social fabric of everyday life, the meanings of creativity remain open for flexible interpretation and differential realizations. In short, whereas all people may agree that creativity is in the heart of any artistic expression, the understanding of what creativity is and how it may be performed is socially constructed (Becker, 1982).

The meaning of creativity, then, is necessarily relative. Therefore, it is of little surprise that people located in different positions within (or on the verge of) the cultural field of arts, feature different perceptions of that idea. But there is more to it than mere perceptions; on the sociological aspect, we must also understand how different perspectives, carried throughout the loose social networks that comprise the field, are translated into contested approaches that render practical implications. In that respect we may claim that amateurish artists and professional ones hold different perceptions of creativity.

The first step to dismantle the complexity of creativity is to differentiate creativity from the close-related notion of innovation (Edmonds & Candy, 2002). As we will show later in the article, these two close concepts which sometimes are referred to as synonymous, could misjudge modest artists' works as uncreative. In their groundbreaking critique, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno (2002) famously pointed to the difference between creativity and innovation and claimed that the false association between them is a consequence of strategic deception. In the context of industrialization of culture, where entertainment cannibalizes legitimate arts, innovation seems to appear as daring creativity although its socializing effect is in fact the opposite, *i.e.* the normalization of conservatism. On the other hand, artists who work in a less permissive environment, sometimes under restricting regimes and against rigorous inspection, are pushed for higher levels of creativity in order to express themselves (Miłosz, 1953).

Critics of contemporary art, in Israel and beyond, have also mentioned this phenomenon. Artist and art critic, Jossef Krispel, recently expressed his dissatisfaction with the biennale contemporary artworks, "it seems that today artists investigate everything except creativity" (2019). Along the same line, Israeli theoretician and curator Gideon Ofrat described contemporary Israeli art in terms of "minor art". These days, wrote Ofrat, a day tour through leading art galleries in Tel Aviv, Israel, ceases to provide the observer with a thrilling experience it once offered. Here too, sophisticated technologies and at times technical virtuosity come on the expense of radical statements and creativity. "Young artists seek to define themselves in personal vulnerability developing a pale and vague artistic style [...]" (Ofrat, 2010, p. 61).

On the other hand, modest artists often reveal great passion for exploring different media, techniques and materials. They, who are free of the requirement to distinguish themselves in the competitive field, to gain prominent position in it, and to make a living out of it, can become more creative within styles which are less innovative in nature. Moreover, beyond the question of artistic quality, the very choice of non-professional artists to express themselves by means of art can be seen as a creative disposition. Janice Radway (1984) famously analyzed the consumption of "banal" literature among working class women. She found these women to be significantly inspired by this literature, and the act of reading as in itself creative, regardless of the possible outcomes of such inspiration.

### 3. The Upper-Floor Gallery artists: study participants and methodology

Over the last eight years, one of the authors (Shahar Marnin-Distelfeld) has been working as a curator at the Upper-Floor Gallery (UFG) in the MC and public library of Kiryat Tiv'on.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> We would like to thank the artists of the UFG for sharing their thoughts, feelings and their artworks with us. Their cooperation was crucial for the success of the study.

The gallery, exhibiting about ten shows a year, hosts mostly local artists; it is not an independent gallery but rather part of a larger complex serving as a commemoration center for fallen soldiers who had lived in the town at the time of their death. This center also houses a public library, an auditorium and another gallery dedicated to Israeli art. While the UFG artists are charged for their exhibitions, the Israeli art gallery on the first floor is sponsored and supervised by the Ministry of Culture (MIC), and therefore features “prominent” Israeli artists who exhibit free of charge (Misrad Hatarbut, 2018). The UFG artists approach the MC with the wish to exhibit their work, while in the case of the Israeli art gallery, its curator is the one to approach artists for the exhibitions she plans, offering them participation in solo exhibitions or in group shows. Most of the UFG artists are middle-class people in their fifties, sixties or seventies, retirees, who have chosen to invest both time and money in promoting their art as “serious leisure”. Two-thirds are females and the rest – males.

The UFG artists are regarded as “amateurish” by the inner rational of the MC, even though no one uses this term, but rather perceives this gallery as less worthy artistically speaking. Very often, people visiting the Israeli art gallery will not even bother to visit the UFG. The UFG artists are considered “amateurish” also because they started making art later in their lives, having devoted themselves to other professions for years. On the other hand, most artists who exhibit in the Israeli art gallery are considered “professional” or “prominent” since they are rather young, known or even well-known in the field, holding a degree in the arts and are managing themselves actively “by the rules” within the realm of the Israeli art scene.

The two galleries share a building, but function inversely. The physical division between the galleries, located on two different levels, represents a symbolic separation between what is defined by the artistic establishment as “prominent art” and what is seen as “amateurish”. The MIC, while setting the terms of supporting a certain gallery, lists several elements, among them a recommendation for the institute (*i.e.* the curator) to choose a “prominent artist”: defined by the Committee of Fine Arts as “an artist whose artwork has been exhibited in museums or galleries, and has also contributed significantly to the artistic life in Israel”, according to the committee (Misrad Hatarbut, 2018). In spite of it being rather vague, this condition would usually keep most artists who are considered “amateurish”, and whom we name “serious-leisure-amateurish”, away from proper Israeli art galleries.

Despite Abbing’s diagnosis of the “absence of entrance-barriers in the arts”, referring to youngsters willing to become artists (2004, p. 3), artists displaying their art in one gallery will, by no means do it in the other one, for reasons of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2005, pp. 113–114). Many artists who have exhibited in the UFG, first approached the curator of the Israeli art gallery, supervised by the MIC, and were rejected by her on the ground of the lesser quality of their art, the lack of exhibition record in galleries which are considered “prominent”, or both. The rest of the artists exhibiting on the UFG have never approached the more professional gallery in the first place, either for fear of being refused or since they thought their art would better fit the UFG, thought to be an “amateurish” space.

Exploring the phenomenon of “amateurish” artists showing at the UFG can serve as a case study for the wider Israeli art scene. In an attempt to profoundly explore this phenomenon, we combine content analysis with art-history methods in a qualitative study based on some thirty visual artists whose art one of the authors has curated over the past eight years. As a

grounded theory study, we have examined the phenomenon of "amateurish artists" in this gallery through content analysis of interviews with the artists. The interviews, which were held in Hebrew, are quoted here in their English translation (done by the authors), and their real names have been changed to keep their privacy. This study will also look at their works of art to find out whether there is a typical theme/style/technique characterizing them as a distinct group. Three selected works of three different artists will be analyzed in this article. This examination will be carried out through a stylistic-iconographic-interpretive analysis of the artistic corpus chosen for the various shows. A qualitative method has been applied as it focuses on a search for the meaning attributed by the artists to their art. This meaning was elicited from the semi-structured depth interviews and other documents relating to the process of constructing the exhibitions. The study is inductive by essence, namely, the insights were crystalized by accumulating data and formulating a theory gradually (Tsabar Ben-Yehoshua, 2001, pp. 13–14).

We will try to figure out how these artists, labeled as "amateurish" by the establishment, define themselves, how their daily activities are organized, what their artistic perceptions are in regards to the art world and what the rationale underlying their dedication to art is, despite the hardships they encounter (Deener, 2009). A parallel question to be examined relates to the works themselves: Can we detect specific characteristics of their art marking it as "amateurish"? Could these characteristics be named "modest" instead, meaning art that is done well artistically, yet remains under the umbrella of unprofessional art? Our examination will thus be based on three aspects: theme, style and technique (Direktor, 2013, p. 27).

## 4. Findings and discussion

### 4.1. Do "amateurish" artists create "amateurish" art?

Following Bourdieu's suggestion to understand cultural products in regards to social agents rather than within an autonomy of meaning, we believe that "visual imagery is never innocent; it is constructed through various practices, technologies and knowledge" (Rose, 2012, p. 17). These are always related to social life and social structures (Dekel, 2015, p. 41). Having claimed that, is there a way to analyze an artwork independently of the artist? Is an artwork a separate entity at all? According to Gadamer, the answer is "yes". He defines it as a "being", a standalone appearance, which is supposed to create an experience that leaves behind everything the observer has known or felt before (Gadamer, 2006, p. 74–75). He suggests to replace the word "work" by the word "creation", "[...] this creation is not something that we can imagine being deliberately made by someone [...] the thing now 'stands' and thereby is 'there' once and for all [...]" (Gadamer, 1986, pp. 33–34). However, in the art scene, art is usually examined in relation to its creator. Rarely do museums or galleries consider artwork for an exhibition as a standalone object. Usually, a first step for considering art to be exhibited would be checking out the artist's resume – credentials, awards, collections owning his/her works and record of exhibitions. While looking at the art made by a person, there are unwritten conventions and principles for differentiating "professional" art from other types of art which is considered generally as "amateurish". The curator of the local Israeli art gallery

(on the first floor) told us: “[...] there are no clear rules to indicate good art, and still people within the art field will give approximately the same evaluation of a certain piece of art” (Marnin-Distelfeld & Dorchin, 2018).

The question whether there is such distinctive art created by the artists of the UFG, who are considered by the establishment “amateurish” and less creative, is a complicated one to answer. There are no specific criteria for “professional” art, nor for quality art or “high art”, agreed upon by all professionals in the field of visual art. As a result, any attempt to define “good art” will result in both uncertain and vague answers. This field, like other fields in the arts (music or fashion design, for instance), is characterized by indefinite features, fluid trends based on fashion and taste of their time (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 185). Nevertheless, we will try to approach the question of the definition of the art itself, one that is usually left untreated in relation to art projects in general. In order to define one’s art as “amateurish”, we need to define, at first, the opposite, namely “professional” art, or “proper artistic level” as the MIC defines it (Misrad Hatarbut, 2018). And here again we are caught between vague values, understood by those who phrased them, grasped by all the others. The official establishment does not define the criteria of “proper artistic level” that is required from a supported gallery. This level is determined by the professionals of the MIC based upon visits to the gallery as well as the curator’s annual reports (Misrad Hatarbut, 2018).

The analysis of the artwork by the artists of the UFG is based on curating and observing about fifty solo exhibitions over the past eight years. In most cases, these exhibitions were the first large-scale collection of the artist chosen to be shown, leaving no significant pieces out. Therefore, we consider these exhibitions as highly representative of these people’s art. Earlier in the article, we explained the decision to label our artists as “serious-leisure-amateurish” under the SLP, rather than as simply “amateurish”. We also chose to relate to the definition of “modest” artists placing our artists between amateurish and professionalism. In this section, we will present common findings that seem to advocate these definitions.

It is not at all clear how to define “good” or professional art in Israel or elsewhere today. Gadamer refers to art as “so true, so full of being” linking it to philosophical concepts such as “truth”, “absoluteness” and “the beautiful” (1986, pp. 192–196). Each one of them is perceived by the observer if the work of art is “good”, but they are not measurable and cannot be achieved by following a protocol. For example, in Gadamer’s theory “[...] art is a ‘statement of truth’ with the power to ‘affect us immediately’” (2006, p. 58). Once again we remain with a sense of blurry ideas of how to distinguish a “good” piece of art from a “bad” one. However, in this study we have tried to investigate the artwork in order to figure out, at least, what characteristics could distinguish what is considered “amateurish” and “professional”. We focus on three aspects: theme, style and technique. Themes include every topic one can think of, from minimal abstract drawings to hyper-realistic figurative descriptions, through botanical-inspired flowers to harsh nudes. It is not so much the selection of themes which determines a work of art as “prominent” but rather its style and technique. Any topic could be expressed by using certain artistic tools to make it look more updated, more relevant to the “high art” scene, and therefore more “professional”. To become “professional”, a theme needs to be worked on profoundly, so as to explore its complexity and richness. Every theme is in danger of becoming irrelevant, outdated and boring, if treated traditionally the way

many artists have done before, or if treated too simply. An artwork must not be a "one-to-one" version of a situation, a landscape, a figure, in order to be labeled "professional" today. Gadamer explains that "The work of art is an assertion, but it is one that does not form an assertive sentence [...]" (2006, p. 72). "Professional" artists are supposed to demonstrate creativity as well – a principle which is uncertain and vague.

Many of the UFG artists fail to develop their themes further away from the direct image they portray. They keep their theme so close to the viewer, wishing to create an imitation of reality in their drawing, painting or sculpture, that it leaves not much room for interpretation. This reduces the potential for a meaningful observation. Gadamer argues that an artwork should not attempt to reflect a likeness to something the observer would recognize, but rather "It comes forth! Is something that one has never seen in exactly this way before" (2006, p. 75). Being too clear, too straightforward could limit a work of art from reaching the status of professional contemporary art, as it is perceived by the establishment as lack of creativity and originality.

Many of the UFG artists make series of themes. They treat a specific topic from different viewpoints, in a way typical to "professional" artists. However, in general, themes of the UFG artists tend to deal with traditional subjects, both universal values and concepts, like affection, tranquility, peace, and their personal experiences whether in a domestic space or out traveling. While we might claim that these are the core themes of a lot of artwork done by many artists ever, we do notice a common attitude conveyed by the UFG artists towards these topics. Self-portraits, portraits of family members, indoor domestic scenes or outdoor ones, e.g. in the garden with pets, are rather popular among the themes. Landscapes of familiar surroundings or those of faraway lands explored during travelling are also very common. These traditional themes are perceived by the establishment as less creative than other themes that are more original, current and updated.

Very rarely do we find political agenda in the art of the UFG artists. By the term "political" we mean any theme or ideology that is part of a social-political discourse in our society. The absence of political topics contributes to a sense of outdated imagery, compared to contemporary art exhibited in "prominent" galleries and museums that very often tend to deal with socio-political issues of our time. In addition, the UFG artists tend to avoid conceptual themes all together. This feature, we believe, indicates the different route of "amateurish" artists to the art field, then that of "professional" artists who got trained in art schools from an early age. The lack of this professional orientation results in choosing themes that are considered outdated or irrelevant to the *zeitgeist*. Some guidance could change this situation dramatically as seen in cases of amateurish artists who get an art coacher.

Besides the themes, what strongly defines the UFG art as "amateurish" rather than "professional", is the style and technique they apply. However, technical skills would be the main characteristic defining them as "modest" rather than simply "amateurish". It is important to notice that many of these artists show great creativity in the way they work with the materials. People who express great desire towards the art making process, usually starting "from scratch", may be regarded as highly creative. However, if creativity is judged by experts and agents within the art field, they would probably dismiss this kind of creativity. Most UFG artists reach a professional level of technical skills by learning and training in

studios of experienced artists. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, while every topic could be considered “high art”, the choice of style and technique is highly crucial to the definition of art. Many UFG artists use traditional styles and techniques like watercolor on paper, oil on canvas, etching, wood sculpture, stone sculpture or steel sculpture. While “prominent” artists use these materials too, they often create original works by combining those materials and techniques with other unexpected materials or ready-made objects. Furthermore, when using traditional materials, “prominent” artists will tend to challenge traditional styles, themes and techniques, searching for the “next thing” – a novel creation. “Amateurish” artists tend to rehearse classical and traditional techniques, therefore their works seem to resemble, sometimes imitate, past artistic manners. Professional artists, on the other hand, would tend to demonstrate a greater sense of innovation and originality.

UFG artists often follow both material and stylistic conventions without artistically challenging the observer. This feature explains the appeal experienced by audiences who prefer familiar, expected, traditional forms of art, rather than contemporary “high art” which often defies these. Installation and performance – two highly popular contemporary media are not part of the UFG repertoire as well.

Haim Azuz’s sculpture, *A Presence of Two* (2010) (Figure 1), would serve as a suitable example to discuss the definition of “amateurish” art that we would like to define as “modest” (on the axis between “amateurish” and “professional”). The theme of couple-hood, which the artist has elaborated in several sculptures over the years, is universal. There have been numerous sculptures dealing with this topic considered “high art” (Constantin Brâncuși’s *The Kiss* (1907), to mention only one). It is not its theme, which makes this art “amateurish”, nor is it the high skills of the sculptor treating the wood, but rather the style; the choice to create the man and the woman out of the same piece of wood, and the even composition of them facing each other, conveys the idea of couple-hood at first glance in a rather naïve way.



Figure 1. Haim Azuz. *A Presence of Two* (2010). Eucalyptus wood, 40×20×30 cm  
(source: courtesy of the artist)

Furthermore, these artistic devices are traditionally known from art history, in regards to both the subject matter and the treatment of the wood as an old-fashioned sculpting material. As seen in Azuz's sculpture, UFG artists usually avoid innovative stylistic issues. Challenging the unity of the two figures, creating a more interesting composition and perhaps combining the wood with different materials might have contributed to greater potential of interpreting this artwork. The choice of theme and the well-established curving skills could place him as "professional" if it were not for his naïve and plain rendering. His traditional approach in this specific piece would be probably perceived as outdated by artistic agents, labeling it as "amateurish", while we would label it "modest" instead, thanks to a high-level wood curving skills that is not simply achieved by an amateur. Here again, the question of creativity becomes relevant, as for the artist himself the very idea of making this sculpture is a creative act. This would also be the experience of many people who observe the work. Nevertheless, for experts within the art field, the traditional style and technique would categorize it as lacking creativity on the basis of being un-inventive.

Landscapes are a common theme among the UFG artists too. They draw and paint near-by landscapes, explored during hiking or biking, and also landscapes travelled to and documented by photos. Such is the work *Boats, Myanmar* (2017) by Ali Gonen (Figure 2). As in the case of Azuz, Gonen is a self-taught artist, who succeeded in reaching a high level of artistic skills. We definitely cannot define this art as "amateurish" based on the high level technique. Based on the observation of the brush work, we would rather define it as "modest", between amateurish and professionalism. Using watercolor, he drew a few boats floating on the river by twilight. This artwork is well composed in terms of evenly locating the boats – two in the foreground, three a bit further back. The effect of light and shadow is meticulously rendered to create a realistic atmosphere of the scene. What makes it "amateurish" with a slim chance to gain positive feedback from contemporary "prominent" galleries and museums, is



Figure 2. Ali Gonen. *Boats, Myanmar* (2017). Watercolor on paper, 50×70 cm (source: courtesy of the artist)

both the theme and the style. This piece suggests a colorful impression of a moment, using all the colors of the rainbow, a sensually pleasant image which leaves little room for thought: no question asked, no enigmatic episode to follow. What could be considered “high art” in the end of the 19th century, is considered superficial and “amateurish” today.

Keren Rot is a semi-retired environmental scientist, working with a high-quality dissecting microscope. Over the years, she has found a way to take pictures through the microscope by holding her digital camera onto one of the eyepieces (“oculars”) of the microscope. She photographs microscopic crystals, precipitated from solutions of a variety of salts and sugars, sometimes with pigments added to the solution (before the materials crystallize). She often integrates images of different kinds into selected works using *Adobe Photoshop*. In this work (Figure 3), we see the *First Candle of Hanukkah* (2015) added to a photo of a soy sauce crystal illuminated with white LED light; this was the first of eight made by the artist in celebration of the Jewish holiday of light. The works of Rot are unique in technique, combining two fields – that of chemistry and that of photography. The images are formalistic, abstract, but many times alluding to realistic objects or landscape views, suggesting familiar visual experiences we have seen on other occasions. Apart from nature and the field of photography, Rot also integrates her own cultural world into her art, as seen in this specific piece as well as in others. Rot’s collection of works, echo the works of the prominent artist Vik Muniz, who also uses various materials, sometimes natural ones, to create images to be photographed later on. Her “amateurish” art is quite updated in terms of technique, and therefore we would define it as “modest” instead.

Rot’s works, are by all means creative, as she integrates various materials and techniques in a highly exceptional way. However, what keeps Rot’s works from being exhibited as “professional” art in “prominent” galleries or museums is her themes and mostly her stylistic choices. Being loyal to a natural order, she allows the crystals to shape themselves gradually,

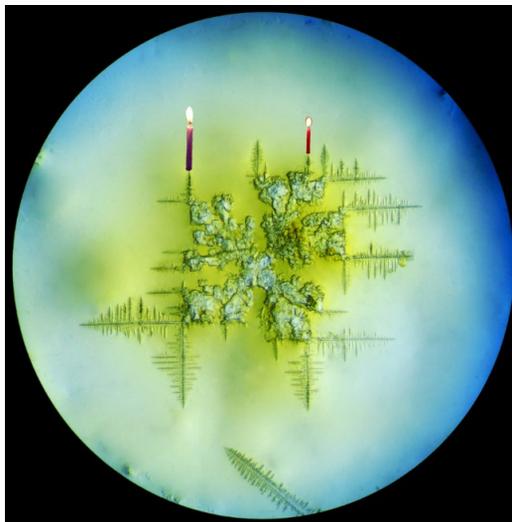


Figure 3. Keren Rot. *First Candle of Hanukkah* (2015). A photo of a soy sauce crystal (source: courtesy of the artist)

and this enables a variety of forms to be viewed under the microscope and be captured by her camera. Manipulating the color and lighting of the crystals as captured by the camera, as well as designing the final composition of the print, create spectacular images that glorify the beauty of nature. Contemporary art is somewhat suspicious towards spectacular art, unless it carries some socio-political message. The beauty of nature is not complex and sophisticated enough to make her art seen as "prominent". While audiences of ordinary people might like the beautiful images based on natural forms and a fine photographic work, the artistic establishment in Israel would nevertheless categorize it as "amateurish".

The three artworks presented above are examples of UFG art considered "amateurish" by artistic agents in Israel, including the MC people. The themes of these artworks can widely vary, but still avoid socio-political issues. Their styles tend to be harmonically pleasant. Technical skills are sometimes poor, but many times are quite professional, with little or no difference compared to those considered "professional" artists. These features of their art, being outdated in relation to contemporary trends, but still rather professional in terms of technical skills, frame "amateurish" artists' art as "amateurish" art. This kind of art exhibited at the UFG, is present all over the country, becoming popular as people live longer, and as a result of a rising standard of living they can afford serious leisure activities such as art.

#### 4.2. The artists express themselves

Our findings indicate that the UFG artists place themselves in an in-between position. Their sense of seriousness; that is, their dedication to and immersion in the work of art, elevate them beyond the status of amateurs aiming at mere pleasure. At the same time, however, their aspirations reveal to them the powers operating in the social field of art, which denies them of the status of "professionals". The UFG artists are thus aware of the apparent criteria defining "professional" artists differently from "unprofessional" ones: younger, holding a degree in the arts, being actively involved in the art scene of Israel, and to a certain extent revalidating them through their discourse. However, several characteristics strongly place them close to professional artists in terms of seriousness and dedication, as well as in their motivation to develop themselves artistically in the field. These characteristics to be discussed further on in the section, justify our definitions of these artists as "serious-leisure-amateurish" and "modest" rather than simply "amateurish".

#### 5. Self-perception

Most of the artists interviewed hesitated to define themselves as artists; some explicitly avoided that self-definition while others embraced it although they realize they are not considered as such by professional agents. In response to the direct question presented by us, "How would you define yourself?", Zamir (73) said, "I deal with sculpting. [...] it is clear to me that I do not belong to the art world". The realization of non-belonging repeats itself in most interviews and explains why it is so difficult for the artists to perceive themselves as such. Like Zamir, Haim (73) said, "I am satisfied with the fact that I have the privilege to deal with art" and Gabriel (77) said that "I perceive myself as a *creator* more than an artist". Keren (69)

explained, “until 2008, I did not realize my photographs were art”. In spite of her discovery of the artistic values of her output, Keren still expresses reservation about the “artist” title saying, “I do not call myself an artist, but I know that what I do is art”. Hence, “creating” art, “dealing with” art, or “doing” art can be understood as discursive strategies by which the speakers bypass the obligating title of “an artist” while still emphasizing clear aspect of seriousness and creativity. Only one interviewee (Gabriel), used the explicit term “amateur” but as was stated above, he too shirks that degrading term presenting himself also as “a creator”. Toren (73) avoided any term while asked about his self-definition, saying,

“I am trying not to deal with definitions. From an early age, being the son of a painter, I was well aware of the sociology of the art world, as well as of my poor ability to navigate within it. Therefore, I prefer to focus on making art in artistic circles where I feel comfortable”.

Unlike the speakers cited so far, other interviewees took on the definition of “artist”. One of them is Mimi (63), who used to work as an art teacher in public schools located in the periphery of Israel. When asked to define herself, Mimi says, “I see myself as a professional artist. I am particularly professional in etching. My works are very touching and absolutely professional in terms of technique”. In other words, the decisive aspect that enables Mimi to see herself as an artist is her proven etching skills and not the question of involvement in any artistic milieu. Accomplished technique is indeed the condition by which an artist is measured, but there is more to that. “I have painted all my life”, she says, “it’s part of my self-identity; in fact, even my earliest memories concern painting”. The technical aspects can therefore be seen as a consequence of more intrinsic aspects, *i.e.* the reflective work done by the person and which distinguishes him/her from those whose work remain a technical matter. As Mimi puts it, “I meet many women who are in a similar situation to mine; they create and search for opportunities to exhibit and sell their work. Not many are doing an inner-work as I do, though”.

Vered (68) and Ilana (65) are two other women who regard themselves as artists. Referring to her first exhibition in the UFG, in 2010, Vered says,

“The feeling I had at the Memorial Center was not good, as if I was inferior to those presenting downstairs at the Israeli art gallery. At that stage, I experienced myself as someone who simply makes art whereas today I experience myself as an artist”.

Ilana similarly says, “For many years I have considered myself as a ‘painting woman’ and only recently do I feel I can call myself an artist”. Of all the artists interviewed, Vered is the one who works, exhibit and sells most intensively, both in Israel and abroad. Like Mimi, who was mentioned above, Vered attributes her sense of self-recognition not to her technical skills or to the value of her products but rather to a personal process she went through, which is based on a strong sense of creativity. This process could be seen as another characteristic of professionalism, distinguishing “amateurish” from “serious-leisure amateurish” like Vered. Vered, states that

“I keep myself busy with art for many hours a day, either practically or by reading, thinking, searching and planning, or visiting museums and galleries and meeting with other artists. Most of the time during the week I focus on art and my identity as an artist feels great to me”.

Vered's every-day life is pretty much based on creativity. She perceives all her activities as part of a creative way of life. Ilana voices a similar narrative,

"I live the art-world as part of my life environment. I follow what happens by reading, visiting exhibitions, listening to lectures, and obviously by making art. [...] I am an artist as a way of life, as a way to look at life and due to the necessity to express things in paints and words".

What we see here is a subjective narrative of perceived development, a process of personal growth that enables a complementary progress to the status of being a "real" artist, supporting the definition of a "modest" or "serious-leisure-amateurish" artist as opposed to an "amateurish" one. Creativity seems to play a central role in both Vered's and Ilana's experiences, regardless of the artistic outcome they might accomplish at the end. Haim articulates this dimension once more,

"to sculpt a nice swan or to paint a refined portrait is a combination of technical skills and visual perception; although this can bring about aesthetic pleasure it cannot stimulate any further thought. For me studying philosophy constituted an important perceptual infrastructure; it sharpened my critical observation and perception of the world".

## 6. Rejection

Every serious leisure activity contains its own tensions, dislikes and disappointments, which each artist must confront occasionally (Stebbins, 2015, p. 13). Apparently, the subjective narrative of development denotes a potential to become a full-fledged artist. However, this narrative does not undermine the vague – yet well-established – boundaries separating "modest" from "professional" art. Practical efforts made by the artists to fulfill this potential bring them face to face with mechanisms that organize the politics of value in the field and reveal to them some objective obstacles.

In order to put themselves on the track of advancement, most of our "serious-leisure-amateurish" or "modest" artists approached various study programs. However, due to their age, the phase they have reached as retirees, and various commitments, their studies often were held in marginal institutions and sporadic programs rather than in recognized academic or professional ones. After his retirement, Haim registered for a sculpting workshop at the Yizrael Valley Community College and completed only the first year. This one year, he says, exposed him for the first time to the realm of sculpting:

"I experienced working with clay, plaster, casting techniques and some wood-carving. It gave me basic tools for my art. During the following years, I participated in short-term lessons in wood sculpting, stone sculpting and drawing. I learned the rest in an autodidactic way based on technical abilities I acquired through the years (as a practical engineer)".

Mimi, an art school-teacher says, "Aside from my formal B.Ed. studies, I took several courses in painting, participated in few programs, and was granted a diploma as an instructor of intuitive-drawing in the Pinki Feinstein approach". Ilana, registered for the external art studies at Oranim Academic College (OAC), Kiryat Tiv'on, alongside her regular work

as a nurse. “I learned painting with a few artists”, she says. “Each of them contributed to the development of my drawing approach”. Despite this contribution, Ilana still chose to refer to her teachers in a general manner, as if she doubted whether crediting them by name would establish her own artistic credibility. Even Vered was reluctant to attribute her relative success to the courses she took. She explained that “most of my learning is done by myself and occasionally in short-term courses”.

Zamir is a unique example of a person who did apply for proper academic studies. After taking some courses, he registered at OAC, spent half a year at the University of Barcelona and finally, after his retirement from his professional academic career, applied for studies at the Department of Arts at the University of Haifa. Unfortunately, this application ended with disappointment:

“Following my first solo exhibition in 2012, I thought that if I invested the required efforts and means, I might gain recognition. This is the reason I registered for art studies at the University of Haifa. In my first meeting with the chair of the department he told me, ‘we are not interested in people like you; you are already ‘cooked’. What we want is to shape young people who still don’t know what they are looking for’. All in all, I felt that the art-world as reflected by university teachers, did not consider it plausible for me to become an artist”.

While not all our interviewees expressed a sheer frustration as Zamir did, all of them indeed shared the bitter experience of rejection. This experience is reflected most often in curators’ refusal to include their works in “professional” galleries, like the one located at the first floor gallery at the Kiryat Tiv’on MC. Haim, for example, approached a curator at the Wilfried Israel Museum; unlike Zamir, who was denied for being “cooked”, Haim was explained that he “wasn’t ripe yet”. Haim admits he found this comment “meaningless” but did not insist. “I then applied with another curator but again with no success”.

In that regard, it is interesting to examine those interviewees who defined themselves earlier as proper artists. Mimi admits that applications she sent were ignored by curators more than once (“it doesn’t feel good”). In other cases, she says, “participation cost me a lot of money but at least it gave me the privilege to exhibit”. Mimi, thus, feels herself “at the margins of the art-world”. “My works are good”, she emphasizes, “but I cannot commit myself to making art as a full-time job”. Ilana’s first exhibition took part in Eshkar Gallery, a space that regularly features antiques. Following this debut, she started to understand “the rules of the game”, as she put it, and today she approaches curators representing “spaces that welcome a wide range of less known artists”. Hence, Ilana admits she has “no aspiration to become part of the established art-environment”. Vered claims she has been accepted to about half of the exhibitions she has applied for. Like Mimi and Ilana, she also describes a process of implementing the inner codes of the field. “There are many places [galleries] that require formal academic background; in these cases, I don’t even try out. It gives me the feeling of being an outsider”. It may be understood, thus, that Vered, Ilana, and Mimi’s self-definition as artists acknowledges the intra-sections in the cultural field of arts and do not pretend to challenge it. Their relative success derives from their learnt understanding as to where and to whom they may or may not apply as “modest” artists. It is therefore not surprising that while they seem to acknowledge their artistic value, they also posit themselves as outsiders to the “professional” sphere.

As outsiders, as are most of our interviewees, they do not exhibit very often and do not enjoy the experience of acceptance on a regular basis. On the contrary, more often they find themselves excluded, expelled to humble classes, workshops, and learning programs where they encounter other "amateurish" or "serious-leisure-amateurish" artists like themselves. As Zamir puts it,

"in the workshops in which I participate, I meet with artists that see sculpting as nothing but a hobby and the workshop itself, as a recreational activity. I guess they might as well replace the artistic activity with a card game, sing-along meetings or listening to lectures".

Hence, the lived experience of such social networks caters to a further demarcation of the different spheres comprising the field of art. On the one hand, it differentiates "amateurs", *i.e.* people who seek pleasure, from "modest" or "serious-leisure-amateurish" artists who seek serious leisure. On the other hand, though, it demarcates the "professional" sphere to which "modest" artists cannot be accepted, regardless of their creativity, accomplished skills and refined products.

## 7. Respect and recognition

Being a "modest" or "serious-leisure-amateurish" artist does not entail only frustration and disappointments. As was explained earlier, the mere process of making art is interpreted in terms of personal growth while occasional exhibitions earn the artists many supportive comments and hence satisfaction. This satisfaction is much indeed a central component of what Stebbins defines as the "positive sociology" of the SLP (Stebbins, 2015, p. xv). Positive feedback is usually received by the UFG artists from their close circles of family members and friends. These people escort the artists along the years and their continual presence is therefore significant for the artists. Haim, for example, says that "encouragement from my spouse enables me to work comfortably". Keren says, "Rina, my spouse, is my main source of support and she is the first to see my photographs. I also send it to friends to take a look at. Feedback is very important to me, also from the crowd who attend my exhibitions". Ilana says, "family members and friends support me. Other artists, in a similar status to mine, and even some who are more known, are also companions in this journey".

One may realize the contradiction between the warm hug given to "modest" artists within their intimate circles and the chilly response they often receive from professional agents of the establishment. Zamir puts this contradiction very clearly, stating that "family members, friends and colleagues are supportive and encouraging. For the art-world, however, I am totally transparent, I do not exist". Professionals assess the "modest" artwork in accordance with their inner-codes and standards (as described in the section "Do 'amateurish' artists create 'amateurish' art?"). Their criticism thus often portrays "serious-leisure-amateurish" artists as people who lack the potential to become professional; metaphors of being "cooked" or "not ripe yet" – when referred to a 70-year-old person – convey this message. Family and friends, on the other hand, perceive the artistic work within the context of personal and familial relationships, as part and parcel of their shared experiences. Against this backdrop,

it may be understood why artists feel somewhat unsatisfied with compliments they receive from friends and family. Vered says,

“My most important supporter and critic is my spouse. I also gain support, evaluation and constructive feedback from friends. I feel I’m not exposed to the art-world. Maybe if I studied art in a proper way and was more exposed to peer-critics, it would have filled that void”.

Haim expresses a similar point of view, saying,

“I received many positive responses from the crowd, friends, colleagues and curators of exhibitions in which I participated. But I wonder how I should relate to such compliments that bear no meaningful say or practical criticism”.

Ambition to exhibit one’s works and searching for “meaningful” feedback distinguish “modest” and “serious-leisure-amateurish” artists from simply “amateurish” ones. Whereas “modest” artists do appreciate support given to them by family and friends, they strive for recognition by professionals as well. This may also explain their unwillingness to pay money for the privilege to exhibit. The mere financial aspect is only a part of the reluctance and not necessarily the main consideration (as many of the “modest” artists have the means to sustain their serious leisure). Haim explains,

“I realize that in order to be considered ‘an artist’ I should be prepared among other things to invest money. [...] On the other hand, being accepted for exhibition that requires payment is suspicious of being motivated by a commercial interest; it is not a pure evaluation of my work”.

Expenses thus reveal a symbolic aspect that concerns the economics of artistic image of both the artworks and the artist. The fact that most (if not all) “modest” artists do pay money to be displayed, should thus be understood either as a matter of non-choice or as a practical consideration related to their intense wish to be recognized artistically. This very dilemma, regardless of the different decisions made by each individual, clarifies the in-between position occupied by “modest” or “serious-leisure-amateurish” artists.

This negotiation of “modest” or “serious-leisure-amateurish” artists within themselves and with the art world regarding the conditions of exhibiting their art, echoes the professional-amateurish-public triangle suggested by Stebbins as a model to understand the social structure of the art world. Being public-centered, artists experience different relationships with the public in terms of both recognition and commercialism (Stebbins, 2015, p. 8). “Professional” artists will not pay in order to exhibit their artwork and might expect higher prices when offering their art for sale, while “amateurish” artists (whom we define here as “modest”), will usually pay for their exhibitions, being able to sell their art for lower values. However, it is important to indicate the uncertainty rooted in the lives of any artist, since artists are freelancers, who usually lack any financial support system (Dekel, 2015, p. 43). The instability financial situation is common to all sorts of artists – professionals and amateurish, and it is more the consequence of social structure than of artistic quality. Toren says, “I would be happy to sell more; in addition to the financial aspect [...] selling an artwork is a clear expression of recognition”.

## 8. Rewards

If there is one theme common to all interviewees it is the expression of fulfillment and satisfaction with their artistic life. It is evident from previous studies that artists have been found to be considerably more satisfied with their work than non-artists (Abbing, 2002, p. 3; Steiner & Schneider, 2013, p. 242). Serious leisure participants find their disappointments and dislikes insignificant in comparison with the rewards they gain through their activity, in our case – art (Stebbins, 2015, p. 13). The rewards of a serious leisure pursuit are the routine values that attract and hold its enthusiasts. The search for rewards is a life trajectory, a motivating engine for the “serious-leisure-amateurish” artists. There are two categories of rewards to be enjoyed by them – personal and social. Our interviewees expressed personal enrichment as a prime reward. Vered says, “my occupation as an artist is great for me. It is challenging and full of interesting and reviving forces for me. It opens new horizons and new encounters, as well as marvelous journeys”. What Vered expresses could be defined as personal creativeness, enrichment, gratification and regeneration (Stebbins, 2015, p. 14). Haim also feels grateful for being able to make art as a serious leisure, saying, “From my perspective, making art is an investment in ‘good living’ as I see it”.

Self-actualization is also present within the “serious-leisure-amateurish” artist’ views of their artistic experiences. Haim talks about his sculpting skills, which develop with time, Mimi mentions her etching technique as professional, Toren describes his artistic knowledge being gradually improved as a personal reward. The “serious-leisure-amateurish” artists’ professional artistic knowledge gained over a period of time is perceived by them as a personal achievement. Financial return from the serious leisure activity is another reward less central to their experience, although it is mentioned by many of them as proof of acknowledgment and recognition of their artwork by the public. Toren stresses that “buying an artwork expresses the high evaluation of it”, while Vered mentions the fact that she sells artwork as part of her self-definition and self-gratification as an artist.

Social rewards reported by Stebbins were hardly found by the UFG artists (Stebbins, 2015, p. 14). The importance of sharing their art practices with other “serious-leisure” artists was mentioned by several as a desire, mainly in the context of creating a suitable workshop, and thus facilitating the work itself. Group accomplishment or contribution to the maintenance of a group of “serious leisure” artists were not mentioned in the interviews, perhaps because the UFG artists were mainly focused on individual artwork and exhibitions rather than working with others in teams.

## Conclusions

This study has focused on self-taught visual artists lacking an academic degree in the arts, who still devote most of their time to art and yet encounter a glass ceiling in their attempts to become recognized as fully-fledged artists. We embraced Buscatto’s definition of “modest” artists, applying it on the artists who have exhibited their work at the UFG at the MC of Kiryat Tiv’on. The UFG artists are considered “amateurish” in keeping with rigid criteria formulated by the MIC, which supports art galleries and museums in Israel, where

“prominent” artists usually exhibit. The UFG artists cannot be regarded “prominent” since they are missing three main features of professionalism in regards to visual arts: they do not hold an academic degree in the arts, they have not made significant contribution to the art world of Israel and they do not make a living out of their art. However, we cannot define them as simply “amateurish” since they dedicate most of their time to art, are committed to an everyday schedule devoted to artistic creative activities, are highly motivated to make art and to exhibit their art, perceive themselves as more than amateurish and in fact, at times, do reach the level of what is considered “professionalism”.

Aside from the concept of “modesty”, we examined both the artists and the phenomenon in focus using the SLP. While this theory includes three sub-categories (serious, casual and project-based leisure), we only referred to serious leisure as our framework in this study. We claim that the artists of our study are located on an axis between “amateurish” and “professional” in a fluid area of “serious leisure” which includes creativity as part of their every-day experience. We choose to define them as “serious-leisure” artists based upon their characteristics, both from a sociological point of view as supported by the SLP, and from an artistic point of view, reflected through an analysis of their art. We label their artwork as “modest” based on the analysis of their themes, styles and techniques: their art varies in themes, but avoids socio-political issues as well as conceptual attitudes. Domestic scenes, landscapes and traditional themes, known from the history of art are dominant among “modest” or “serious-leisure” artists’ most prevalent choices. Their style is usually traditional, non-innovative, slightly naïve at times, seeming to search harmonic compositions. Their choices of materials and formats are rather old-fashioned. Their technical skills mainly depend on their training and talent, but could easily reach professionalism given some additional practice and refinement. The aspect of creativity in both their art and personal experience as artists, is present; they perceive their artistic lives as creative while their works sometimes reflect a sense of creativity that is often hidden due to lack of originality.

Our findings indicate that the UFG artists place themselves in an in-between position while their sense of seriousness, that is, their dedication to and immersion in the work of art, elevate them beyond the status of amateurs aiming at mere pleasure. At the same time, however, their aspirations very often encounter the powers operating in the social field of art, which deny them of the status of “professionals”, leaving them painfully frustrated. The UFG artists are thus made aware of the harsh criteria distinguishing “professional” artists from unprofessional ones, the former being younger, holding a degree in the arts, and being actively involved in the art scene of Israel. To a certain extent these artists revalidated their unprofessional status through their discourse. Most of the artists interviewed were hesitant in defining themselves as artists; some explicitly avoided that self-definition while others embraced it despite being aware of the fact that they were not actually considered as such by professional agents. Their self-perception reflected their in-between status, that very thing we call “modesty”. While not all our interviewees expressed a sheer frustration, all of them indeed shared the bitter experience of rejection. This experience is reflected most often in curators’ refusal to include their works in “professional” galleries. However, being a “modest” or “serious-leisure” artist does not entail only frustration and disappointments. The mere process of making art is interpreted by the artists in terms of personal growth and creative

life while occasional exhibitions earn them many supportive comments and hence satisfaction. Positive feedback is usually received by the UFG artists from their close circles of family members and friends. These people escort the artists along the years and their continual presence is therefore highly significant and meaningful for the artists. Most artists do strive to achieve professional recognition, though. If there is one theme common to all interviewees, it is that of a sense of fulfillment in their artistic life. Serious leisure participants find their disappointments and setbacks insignificant in comparison with the rewards they gain through their activity: personal enrichment and gratification, a sense of creativity, self-actualization and some modest financial yield.

Our study reconfirmed the occurrence of the "modest" UFG as a sub-category, prevailing within the art world around us. The terms "modest" and "serious-leisure" artists were proven to strongly validate defining this phenomenon along sociological parameters, with the artistic analysis further supporting this definition. Future studies should further investigate the cases where this "modesty" is challenged, both by the artists themselves and by agents from the establishment, who seek to broaden the limits of what is regarded "amateurish" and conversely "professional". We are well aware of the limitations of our study, which focuses on defining a rather general phenomenon, leaving out exceptions altogether. These exceptions could indeed explore the weaknesses of the study's boundaries and the somewhat fluid territory between what is considered "professional" and "amateurish". We believe that this territory is about to widen itself as more people aspire to create art as a serious leisure activity, being eager to display and share it. The artistic establishment already feels the need to open up its doors, to rethink definitions of art and build art-galleries and alternative spaces for shows, suitable to accommodate the flood of artworks made by older people who live longer and have the financial means to create and display art, albeit "modest".

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## „AŠ NESU MENININKAS, AŠ KURIU MENĄ“: IZRAELIO MENININKAI MĖGĖJAI IR KŪRYBIŠKUMO POJŪTIS

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Santrauka

Šis tyrimas susijęs su savamoksliais vizualiųjų menų kūrėjais, kurie vertinami kaip „mėgėjai“, Kirijat Tivone (Izraelis) įkūrus memorialinį centrą, kuriame jie ekspozicijai savuosius meno kūrinius. Pabandysime išsiaiškinti tiek tiksliai, tiek tik numanomai menininkų „mėgėjų“ charakteristikas bei užginčyti spėjimą mėgėjiškumo ir kūrybiškumo stokos sąsają. Taikoma metodologija apima sociologinį požiūrį

tašką, remiantis išsamiais interviu su menininkais, taip pat meno kūrinio vizualinę analizę. „Kuklių“ menininkų teorija, kurią išplėtojo Marie Buscatto, ir rimtojo laisvalaikio perspektyva, kurią suformulavo Robertas A. Stebbinsas, padės analizei ją paremiančiomis klasifikacijomis ir kategorijomis. Tvirtiname, kad mūsų tiriamų menininkų vieta yra ties „mėgėjiškumo“ ir „profesionalumo“ ašimi, tokioje „rimtojo laisvalaikio“ zonoje. Jie laikomi „mėgėjais“ dėl akademinio išsilavinimo menų srityje stokos, santykinai vyresnio amžiaus, oficialaus pripažinimo nebuvimo, iškilusių įvairių kliūčių demonstruoti savuosius meno kūrinius ir už juos gaunamą nedidelį finansinį atlygį. Nepaisant jų užimamos periferinės pozicijos meno srityje, vis dėlto galėjome nustatyti keletą charakteristikų, kurios atskiria jų meno kūrinius nuo tų, kuriuos sukūrė „profesionalai“. Mūsų išvados įrodo, kad jie priklauso tarpinei „kuklių“ ar „rimtojo laisvalaikio mėgėjų“ menininkų kategorijai, kuri panaikina įsitvirtinusių menininkų „mėgėjų“ ir „profesionalų“ dichotomiją. Nustatėme, kad šių „kuklių“ menininkų patirtis yra kūrybinio pobūdžio kaip ir kai kurie jų meno kūriniai; vis dėlto šio pobūdžio kūrybiškumas, regis, yra ignoruojamas tų sričių profesionalų, kurie suvokia kūrybiškumą kaip inovaciją.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** mėgėjiškasis menas, menininkas mėgėjas, meno sritis, kūrybiškumas, profesionalus menininkas, vizualusis menas.