

# **Outsider Art, In or Outside the World of Art?**

A study of the framing of the paradoxical position of outsider art

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### ABSTRACT

Outsider art has been receiving increasing attention and appreciation within the art world, as the successful annual Outsider Art Fairs in Paris and New York and, closer to home, the recent opening the Outsider Art Museum in Heritage Amsterdam show and *The Museum of Everything* exhibition in Kunsthal Rotterdam indicate. Nevertheless, this art form is usually defined as the art made by artists outside the mainstream art world that could be self-taught, psychiatric patients or other persons who don't form part of the leading art historical discourse. In this study, I research how curators, museum directors, gallery owners and museum visitors deal with this apparent paradox of the contemporary position of outsider art: needing to be "out" to be "in". Can outsider artists who enter the museum walls and the market place still be called outsider? And how and why would certain of the actors of the art field do this?

Departing from the sociological and aesthetic paradoxical position and nature of this art, this thesis uses the data obtained in semi-structured interview sessions with the aforementioned art professionals from Belgium and the Netherlands. By considering the different framing strategies they use, I argue that their framing strategies are manifold and often used in contradictory ways by one and the same person according to the outcomes aimed at. Most of the respondents are reluctant to pin down the borders of outsider art within their practice, as they do with art brut for instance. Two prevailing framings are (1) the focus on the aesthetic and artistic qualities of outsider art, at the expense of its social dimension and (2) the relationship with contemporary art, copying the presentation models for instance. By doing this, respondents give legitimacy to outsider art as a contemporary art form, cutting it loose from its past as a functional or medical past.

Nonetheless, I argue that the findings point out that although respondents advocate inclusion and integration of outsider art in the contemporary art world based on the similarities, on other occasions they still bring forward its apparent otherness, in order to assure the position of outsider art in-between both art worlds.

The findings of this research add to the ongoing debate on outsider art, but also place it in the broader framework of art forms striving for legitimization and show how elementary questions about the nature of art are very present in the framing of outsider art by field professionals whose institutions, for the greater part, also aim at posing questions instead of giving clear answers.

Key words: *outsider art, framing, legitimacy, gatekeepers, contemporary art*

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## **PREFACE**

This thesis would not have been possible without the hospitality of the art studios, museums and galleries I have visited in the past months, and without the time all the respondents spent talking about what one of them called, laughing, his handicap – but what naturally is a passion for a wonderful world of art all of them shared.

Additionally, I would like to thank Nataliya Komarova, for her help and meticulous supervision that kept the research on course.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Outsider Art - Challenging the Arts from Within

“It is hard to express in words the difference between a ‘normal’ work of art and a piece of art brut”, writes art critic and curator Vincent Gille (Gille, 2006, p. 247). Indeed, as obvious the difference between a work of art brut or outsider art and other art might seem, the themes, the style or the used techniques are not radically different. As staggering or outlandish outsider art may look, the references are never totally alien to the viewer. Then why do critics speak of outsider art with a mix of hesitant attraction and fascinated reluctance? Why is it called *outsider art*? What causes this division between *them*, the outsiders, and the other members of the art world?

We have gone a long way since French artists and critic Jean Dubuffet coined the term in the late 1940s, he was the first to consider the “authentic” art of persons whose creations, untouched by and far from the reigning artistic culture, originated from their own depths such as mental patients (Rhodes, 2010, p. 23). Outsider art is inherently paradoxical: it is art made outside the art world that has to be accepted by this world to be seen as art. Historically, art of the mentally ill, for instance, was seen in a functional way, as a tool of therapy or diagnosis (Rhodes, 2010, p. 49), before the art world showed any interest in the aesthetic qualities.

A decisive moment, in the 1970s, was the creation of the term outsider art by Roger Cardinal who broadened the scope, thus including all art made outside the frame of the regular art world such. This category has defied the way art is perceived ever since because the mere existence of outsider art poses a challenge to classical dichotomies such as inside-outside or centre-margin within the art world (Zolberg & Cherbo, 2003, p. 3). Many of these creations were not intended as art, yet the art world has expressed growing interest for it, moving the borders of what is “in” and what is “out”, what is “art” and what is not.

## 1.2 In or Out: The Crisis Point of Outsider Art

In this thesis, I want to address this position of outsider art, by studying the view of different actors from the art field, going from curators to art viewers. Dealing with outsider art brings up fundamental questions regarding the nature, function, ethics and aesthetics of art. It can hardly be addressed as a pure form, nor cannot it be seen as a therapeutic pastime without aesthetic value. In the former case, outsider art would be treated as any form of artistic

expression regardless of the maker's personal or medical situation, something many professionals object to (Jones et al., 2010, p. 6). In the latter case, the artistic value of the work would be ignored: it would not be seen as art lest enter a museum or gallery.

To clarify the starting point of this research, I refer to the "crisis point" outsider art might have reached (Maclagan, 2009, p. 170). Annually, highly regarded Outsider Art Fairs are held in New York and Paris, specialized but hyped outsider art museums open and works by outsiders artists have been sold for over 200 000 \$, with the result that outsider art's to move towards the mainstream seems to have reached the point of being incorporated by it. What happened, then, to the difference Gille (among others) spoke of?

In this move into the mainstream outsider art could lose its originally defining characteristics which are, paradoxically, based on the fact that this art remains outside the recognized art world. The new position of outsider art thus looks problematic: it is accepted for something it ceases to be once it is accepted. If outsider art raises the question "But is it art?", becoming mainstream also challenges outsider art because it obliges the field to consider what, after all, "outsider" means.

Here, several actors play an important role: on the one hand the gatekeepers that frame and select the outsider art in museums, exhibitions, catalogues and galleries, and on the other hand the art viewers who see and interpret the artworks selected by different gatekeepers or intermediaries. Gatekeepers that play a role in all distribution processes from artwork to viewer (Hirsch, 1972, p. 35 & Janssen & Verboord, 2015, p. 7), might be even more influential in the field of outsider art as their endorsement is crucial for the works to enter the art world in the first place, because many outsider artists do not regard themselves as artists.

These professionals from the art world are essentially the ones who deal with the abovementioned questions. Their actions position outsider art within the art world. Their framing strategies and selections will decide if outsider art gets accepted or stays within the margin. In this sense, this thesis research looks at this discussion from a sociological angle.

### **1.3 An Approach to the Research**

This thesis thus departs from this crisis point to research how intermediaries frame outsider art and how, consequently, art viewers position themselves vis-a-vis outsider art. I want to approach this from a both sociological and aesthetical perspective. I consider outsider art as an artform with an inherently paradoxical nature, that poses a challenge to classical conceptions of art.

Given the growing acceptance of outsider art, my research question is *how these actors from the field deal with this paradox and how they frame outsider art in the art field*. I want to study if they strive for, for instance, appreciation or inclusion, and how the paradox is resolved in practice. Theorists say that outsider art forces the viewer to reevaluate what he sees and research has proved that outsider art is appreciated differently (White, Kaufman & Riggs, 2014, p. 145). Yet, I try to study this difference as a sociologically determined position, placing this study in a wider framework of legitimacy and recognition of genre of art – which are concepts, together with framing, that are relevant within the broader art field.

The actors refer to the curators, museum directors, studio coordinators or gallery directors who deal on a daily base with outsider art and influence how it is seen, exhibited and presented to the world. They form part of what could be called the outsider art field, and form part as well of the general art field of museums, galleries and exhibitions of contemporary art.

The goals of this research are multiple: it will add to the discussion on the position of outsider art within the art world and add findings to the existing body of research on framing processes, with results from a field that questions the way art genres are recognized in the first place. It will add a empirical data to a discussion that is highly theoretical at times and in this way it can be useful for museum professionals that work with outsider and non-outsider art. As Belgian curator Jan Hoet noted in the catalogue of the *Middle gate Geel '13* exhibition, that combined both outsider and contemporary art, looking at outsider art is another excellent opportunity to test our beliefs and prejudices about the values of art (Hoet, 2013, p. 6).

This research is a qualitative study from data that is obtained in semi-structured interviews with professionals from the art field in Belgium and the Netherlands that mainly work in museums, art studios or galleries as directors, coordinators or curators. The focus lies on two countries to bring in a wide variety of respondents that can be found within a rather small geographical range. The Netherlands do not have a tradition of outsider art museums and important collections such as de Stadshof Collection have not been put on display there during the last years, but there is a increase of interest. In Belgium, museums of outsider art have been existing for a longer time, and some of them, historically, have close links to the ateliers and art studios were fragile persons create as outsider artists.

## **1.4 Thesis Structure**

Regarding the structure of this research, after the introduction follows a theoretical chapter that begins with an art-historical overview of the valuing process of outsider art and focuses



on the shift from a psycho-clinical approach to an aesthetic one. I will consequently take a step from historical “otherness” to the idea of the Other, thus taking a post-structural or deconstructivist approach. This theory helps to define the paradoxical nature of outsider art, which was one of the main reasons to initiate this study in the first place.

In the second part of the theoretical chapter the focus shifts to sociological concepts that are of key importance to this research. I will discuss what constitutes the art field of cultural production, art worlds and the role of intermediaries and gatekeepers play therein. Processes such as framing and legitimization are discussed separately. This opens a wider perspective and shows connections between the situation of outsider art and other art forms that have gone through similar processes of acceptance. Finally, the art viewer is discussed with the help of the concept of aesthetic disposition. With that background, I present the research question and elaborate on its purpose, list subquestions and formulate expectations.

Afterwards, the methodology and data are discussed in a new chapter, showing how the sample was created and the selection of respondents from the outsider art field was made.

Following are the results of the data analysis. I start off with a discussion of how the respondents define and use the term outsider art before coming to the main discussion parts. First, I discuss how and why respondents oppose the social to the aesthetical dimensions, resolutely choosing for the latter. Secondly, the framing of outsider art both compared to and opposed to contemporary art is discussed thoroughly as, again, this shows how respondents grant legitimacy to outsider art. This chapter ends with a discussion of “cases of appropriation of the brand” outsider art.

These findings lead to a concluding chapter that shows how the framing of outsider art is at times contradictory in order to secure its position, as part of the contemporary art world but with its own unique specificities that makes it stand out. Furthermore, the framing is used mainly to grant legitimacy to outsider art as an autonomous form of art. Finally, the appendices consist of the research material and an overview of the respondents.

In short, I hope to place this thesis in the bigger framework of debates on how framing is done and how an artform receives legitimacy. As this study throws light on the ever-changing position outsider art occupies within the art world, and on how this position is a result of the framing by gatekeepers and art viewers, it might give more insight on how genres distinctions arise, evolve and receive legitimacy. Subsequently, I hope to give outsider art a place where it might not seem to belong; at the centre of our attention.

## 2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Overview

I bring together different concepts and theories to assure that this thesis research is firmly grounded. First, a historical overview of outsider art will lead the reader to an understanding of this art form, starting off with the expressions of asylum inmates and mentally ill persons, afterwards focusing on the creation of terms as art brut and marginal art to the apparent move into the mainstream art world we might be witnessing today. After this, I bring in aesthetic discussions such as forms against function and propose a post-structural view that shows how outsider art is inherently paradoxical and elusive.

In a second part, I will address the concept of the artistic field and discuss gatekeepers and intermediaries that play an important role in the positioning in these fields. I rely on existing studies of mediator's function in other cultural fields such as the publishing or motion picture business (Hirsch, 192), social movements (Baumann, 2006) and general studies on gatekeepers (Heinich, 2012, Janssen & Verboord, 2015). Furthermore, disposition and aesthetic appreciation strategies of art viewers will be studied, since they are an important lead the empirical audience research. Here, I rely mainly on Pierre Bourdieu's description of the aesthetic disposition (Bourdieu 1984). Another lead is Jones et al.'s research during *The Art of Making Sense* at the Cunningham Dax Collection in Melbourne, Australia (Jones et al., 2010).

### 2.2 Theoretical Study of Outsider Art

#### 2.2.1 From Art Brut to Outsider Art

When the art collector and writer Dubuffet came up with the denomination art brut, he referred to the works created in psychiatric hospitals or at the margins of society, outside the bourgeoisie art world (Rhodes, 2010, p. 23). Dubuffet's definition(s) of art brut identified three main characteristics: (1) creators of art brut are mental or social outsiders, (2) their work is produced outside the field and network of "fine arts" that includes schools, museums and galleries and is not intended for an audience, and (3) the subjects, techniques and styles stem from personal invention and are not connected to existing traditions (Thévoz, 1976, p. 10). Social exclusion is thus a main characteristic and condition for something to be considered art brut.

Dubuffet opposed art brut to the culturally accepted art, and saw the former as the most real or true form of art whereas the latter, in his view, had become an artificial practice of copyists that had become alienated from authentic artistic creativity (Allegaert & Marius, 2013, p. 50). Though art brut has become synonymous for art made by psychiatric patients, the original meaning of the term was wider. Every artist that created liberated from the negative effects of culture, could make art brut (Allegaert & Marius, 2013, p. 50).

Though he might have been the first to name this creations art, “art brut” had been made well before. So called primitive art or the art made by mentally ill persons had inspired modernists (Kallir, 2000, p. 3) as well as the avant-garde movements who found authenticity and lost innocence in the work of outsiders (Rhodes, 2010, p. 24). At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, for example, the painter Paul Klee praised the depth and expressive power of the sublime art made by mental patients he had come across (Klee, 1962, p. 183).

Moreover, art made by madmen had been appraised for its apparent freedom and irrational powers during the Romantic Era, when madness and genius were believed to be two sides of the same coin (Jones et al., 2010, p. 18). Nevertheless, it was the imaginary of the lunatic artists that was lauded, at the expense of their actual artwork (Jones et al., 2010, p. 18). Both Thévoz (1976, p. 10) and Zolberg & Cherbo (2003, p. 4) observe that the Western aesthetical canon that has been settled since the Renaissance and was institutionalized in the French Academy, for example, rejects all forms of outsider or marginal art. Even though the noble savage, the primitive or the exotic other has fascinated artists, their actual production was never even close to being included in the canon of recognized high art.

Interestingly, purist Clive Bell has written about primitive art that it was able to move us most profoundly, since this art is purely a form without descriptive quality (Bell, 2011, p. 266). Knowing that he mainly referred to non-Western primitive art, note that he shared a fascination with modernists such as Picasso, but for a different reason. This purely formal approach shall be found problematic when applied to outsider art because it shows an “exoticism”. These views do start a dialogue, and are comparable to the approach of the famous “*Primitivism*” in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: *Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* exhibition that was held at MoMA (1984) and exhibited tribal art in a secondary role compared to canonized Western art (Deliss, 2015, p. 17). But Dubuffet did not consider primitive art as art brut because: though it resides outside of the dominant culture, it is geographically situated outside the dominant circle, as opposed to art brut that has no geographical distance from the centre (Rhodes, 2010, p. 26).

Art brut is no thematic or stylistic denominator nor a historical movement (Rhodes, 2010, p. 15). In the same sense, avant-garde, cubism, impressionism or fauvism are not outsiders' movements: they acted within the canon (Zolberg & Cherbo, 2003, p. 4). So, though Karel Appel and the other Cobra painters struggled to find their primitive child-like self again, they did so within painting history, as a reflection on painting. And even if Edvard Munch suffered from severe depression and suicidal thoughts (Honour & Fleming, 2007, p. 727), he painted for an audience. And though psychoanalysis had a defining influence on the art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was often as a source of inspiration, fascination or a way to renew the artistic production or discourse, as in the case of the Manifesto of Surrealism, for example (Foster, Kraus, Bois & Buchloh, 2004, p. 17). Outsider art, on the other hand, is no opposition to or a renovation of the cultural tradition, it exists detached from it. The (absent) social context is crucial for its existence.

Roger Cardinal extended the frame of art brut in 1972, coming up with the denomination outsider art. He included all art made by persons working or living at the margins of society (Cardinal, 1972, p. 55). Outsider art became the common description for all art made by mentally ill, prison inmates, homeless persons or even certain minority groups.

A classic phase of outsider art could be situated between 1880 and 1950, roughly the period during which much art brut works were made and discovered (MacLagan, 2009, p. 76). Another reason to suppose the Golden Age of outsider art is over can be seen in the new approach to patients after the Second World War: new medicines and generally shorter stays in asylums halted the "supply" of outsider art (MacLagan, 2009, p. 75). In the same sense, Michel Foucault has described a shift from "la folie", the incomprehensible madness, to "la maladie mentale", a curable sickness, in this period, and to new therapies that aimed to normalize the patients, who before were treated as an outcast, living and creating in their own world, found way into normal medicine (Van Haesebrouck, 2008, p. 39).

Nevertheless, while stigmatization of mental health patients decreased, the neoliberal approach to mental health that relies heavily on the DSM V<sup>1</sup> and its diagnostic approach might turn patients into products for pharmaceutical corporations (Petry, 2013, p. 14). This medicalization does not favor the position of outsider artists.

Furthermore, by giving the outsider art its name, it could be categorized and framed by different actors in the field. By calling it art, outsider creation literally entered a new world, a

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<sup>1</sup> The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders is most used manual for everyone involved with mental health and is published by the American Psychiatric Association.

new frame, a new social context. The creation of museums (such as the Collection de l'Art Brut in Lausanne in 1976) added to this because "insiders" started reflecting on outsider art. Living outsider artists were discovered and motivated to create art whereas before much outsider art was discovered after its creation. After a struggle for recognition during the 1950s and 60s, art brut settled itself as an established genre, including a canon of renowned artists by the 1980s (De Cleene & Van Goidshoven, 2013, p. 20).

In result, by the second half of the twentieth century outsider art has been accepted by the mainstream and attracted the booming art market of the 1980s: "[a]s outsider art became fashionable, outsiders became insiders" (Zolberg & Cherbo, 2003, p. 2). Museums dedicated exhibitions to living outsider artists, combining their art with non-outside art, and stretched the denomination to its limits.

Since the 1990s, according to De Cleene and Van Goidshoven, there is a movement of inclusion of outsider art on different levels; within society, in museums, but as well within the work of several contemporary artists (De Cleene & Van Goidshoven, 2013, p. 23). They refer to numerous artists from different disciplines, including performance, theatre, cinema and visual arts who include outsider art or artists (such as mentally disabled actors) in their works. From being (from) a different world, outsiders have to some degree blended in with contemporary art. This leads to the borders that define what is "different" disappear (De Cleene & Van Goidshoven, 2013, p. 24). Well aware of this duality, many outsider art professionals see this as the tension outsider art museums and exhibitions have to make visible (De Cleene & Van Goidshoven, 2013, p.24; Allegaert & Marius, 2013, p. 52). In the accompanying text to *Middle gate Geel '13*, these scholars write that a visitor can either walk away from the exhibition thinking he has seen how alike outsider art is to the other artworks on display, or try to find where the difference between both genres can be found (De Cleene & Van Goidshoven, 2013, p. 24). If a current state of things in the field of outsider art is to be defined, this tension might be the best to describe the situation at hand. There is a multiplicity of meanings in the presentation of outsider art (Jones et al., 2010, p. 6) and every confrontation with other art exposes ethical, aesthetical and social questions that lie at the heart of outsider art's attraction (Allegaert & Marius, 2013, p. 52).

This being said, different museums and galleries have different approaches. The Museum Dr. Guislain, historically, has close relations with the Ghent Museum of Contemporary Art (SMAK) and it is part of their mission to tell the history of psychiatry and expose its close relationship with art and society (Allegaert & Marius, 2013, p. 35). Rather

than providing answers, they pose questions about what normality means: Museum Dr. Guislain has an open mind towards ambiguity. Other museums such as the Musée d'Art Brut in Lausanne have an archival mission inspired by the preservation of collections of art brut as defined by Jean Dubuffet ("La Collection De L'Art Brut Aujourd'hui", 2016). The Vienna-based exhibition space Haus der Künstler that is associated to a mental health institute, on the other hand, presents the creations of the patients as contemporary art (Allegaert & Marius, 2013, p. 54). Another approach can be found in the British Bedlam archive that exhibits outsider art in thematic exhibits on psychiatric subjects (Allegaert & Marius, 2013, p. 54).

Without making a general statement, we see that different approaches to outsider art exist: the term art brut is mainly used by French-based museums, and is employed by Brussels and Walloon institutions as well. The term implies a rather historical approach to outsider art that is based on Dubuffet's criteria and the characteristics of artists he discovered and endorsed. As a result, nowadays, art brut is mostly used for a historical form of art that set such strict borders that it cannot be found made or found today (Van Goidshoven, 2015, p. 8).

The term outsider art (or a translation) is recurrent in other regions and its reach seems wider as it often includes folk art, visionary art, or intuitive art, to the point that it becomes a portmanteau word (Allegaert & Marius, 2013, p. 53). Next to being used by an ever-growing group of artists, the word also received a commercially attractive appeal in the art world, which clearly goes against its initial sense and purpose (Van Goidshoven, 2016, p. 8). In Flanders and the Netherlands, outsider art is the frequently encountered term, and an example can be found in the recently opened Outsider Art Museum of the Hermitage Amsterdam<sup>2</sup> and in the Museum Dr. Guislain.

In short, different museums and institutions use different denominations and the term art brut has evolved from a term that refers to an "anti"-institutional art form and many other terms have been coined, each with its own peculiarities, including art brut *contemporain*, singular art, naive art, self-taught and outsider art. These terms might be used to focus on the position or (medical) biography of the artists, the nature of the artworks or the position of a whole genre in relation to the mainstream art world. In one word, there is a movement towards the mainstream, an institutionalization of outsider art and an enlargement of the very idea of outsider art.

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<sup>2</sup> The Hermitage Amsterdam opened the first Outsider Art Museum in the Netherlands on March 17, 2016.

But despite, or because of, these different vision and the ambiguities of the “impossible” term, the term serves as a provoking starting point for new research and will be the one that I use in my research.

### **2.2.2. An Aesthetic Evolution: From Function to Form**

As said, art made by mental patients was examined well before Dubuffet named it art brut. Accounts of patients expressing themselves in asylums and mental institutions go back to the eighteenth century but the earliest remaining examples date from the nineteenth century (Rhodes, 2010, p. 48). The now famous works of Adolf Wölfli were created in an asylum where he was encouraged to express himself. But if the result of this expression had any value, it was purely functional.

Doctors and psychiatrist used the creations to diagnose (Jones et al., 2010, p. 15) or illustrate syndromes to other people (Rhodes, 2010, p. 49). Nobody in his right mind would have considered the wild paintings “art”; it was impossible to regard them in an aesthetical way. Though psychoanalysts were the first to appreciate the insight art could give into the mind of the artists (from patients and non-patients<sup>3</sup> or artists alike), the use-value of the artworks prevailed (Jones et al., 2010, p. 15). Nevertheless, the study of the unconsciousness by Sigmund Freud contributed substantively to the appreciation of art by the mentally ill (Kallir, 2000, p. 4). Rather than being only part of the diagnosis, creative works were perceived as revelations of something unknown.

The first collections of artworks created in asylums served the same clinical goals: they were collected as examples of syndromes such as schizophrenia (Jones et al., 2010, p. 15). Nevertheless, important collections as the Prinzhorn Collection, the Cunningham Dax Collection or Dubuffet’s personal collection in Lausanne steered the focus towards a more aesthetical interpretation of the works as they regarded them as forms of “personal expression” (Jones et al., 2010, p. 15). Moreover, next to psychiatrists, curators or art historians got involved at the moment outsider art entered the museum walls (Jones et al., 2010, p. 16). This movement went hand in hand with a need for framing that was done with figures with authority in the art world or figures from the medical world as was the founder of the Prinzhorn Collection, doctor and art historian Hans Prinzhorn. On the institutional level, the Prinzhorn Collection made this movements as well, by evolving from a medical collection “to an art institution, with greater public engagement and access” in the 1970s (Jones et al., 2010, p. 15). The efforts of Prinzhorn sorted a sociological effect as well, by combining

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<sup>3</sup> If such a thing exists.

aesthetic and ethic preoccupations, the position of the outsider as an artist gained validity (Allegaert & Marius, 2013, p. 49). This constituted a clear change in the framing of the artworks: a move away from the medical world into the art world, while still cherishing the own, unique position of outsider art in this new environment.

It is interesting to note how modernist artists read the art of outsiders in the first place as artworks freed of all restricting boundaries, whereas psychoanalysts saw the desperate urge to create order and the symptoms of self-dislocation (Foster et al., 2004, p. 16). From having only psycho-clinical relevance, we can thus observe a turn towards a formal appreciation and interpretation of outsider art that took in account the artistic merits of the works, culminating in the creation of the terms *art brut* and *outsider art*, and the inclusion in the art world.

But in spite of this grown aesthetical valuation, outsider art resists to be viewed from a purely aesthetical point of view. Lanoux stated that meaning falters in the face of outsider art (Lanoux, 2006, p. 258), saying that this art challenges the regular way of looking at art. For the French video artist and critic Patricia Allio it is almost an ethical obligation to realize that aesthetics and ethics are always part of our perception of it (Allio, 2006, p. 272). This indissoluble connection between aesthetics and ethics in the experience of outsider art thus challenges the view of formalism wherein neither the state of mind nor the personal circumstances of the artist are taken into consideration, as stated by Bell (2011, p. 263).

One could say that Collingwood's theory about the discovery of emotions through art falters here (Collingwood, 2011, p. 286). In the strict sense of the definition of outsider art, the creators live "detached from society" and they create without an intended audience or a clear aim to express their emotions. A painting by Wölfli showing his universe fascinates or scares, yet it has no place for the viewer or his feelings (Murrell, 2005, p. 3). A one-dimensional ethical or aesthetical approach results impossible: the medical, historical, social, personal, moral and aesthetical dimensions are always part of the experience of the work (Jones et al., 2010, p. 6). Questions surrounding all art experiences such as "How much context is needed to see art?" or "Does the intention of the artist matter?" are inherently present in an encounter with outsider art.

In brief, there is an ever-present duality in outsider art: on the one hand the social dimension and on the other hand the aesthetic dimension that has become valued over the course of the past century. Outsider art can be framed as a tool of emancipation for fragile persons and artists. Yet, in the contemporary art world, conceptual and formal aesthetic



rationales are far more present. Notwithstanding this, strong voices can be heard that opt for this duality in favor of a one-dimensional focus.

### **2.2.3 From Otherness to the Other in Us: A Post-Structural Approach**

The “impossibility” of outsider art has been present from the moment Dubuffet decided to call what was created outside the eye of the world art. Though he never wanted art brut to be included in art history or his collection to be public, speaking of it inevitably led to its inclusion in the art world (Thompson, 2006, p. 65). Paradoxically, outsider art needs to be radically “out” to be able to be considered as art (so, to be “in”). The definitions from Dubuffet and Cardinal both stress the outsider position of the maker. The art is thus not created within the art world, but only brought into it by authorities other than the maker. Outsider art is lifted up to the level of “art” by someone other than the artist.

In 1968, the Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz, aware of this, wrote to Dubuffet: “You should never locate it in the abstract or the concrete, in life or in culture, you must be in between, in both things at once” (as cited by Allio, 2006, p. 271). Dubuffet’s attempt was doomed to fail from the start when he wanted to search for art entirely outside the cultural world (Rhodes, 2010, p. 14). Voila the paradox of outsider art, again.

Over time, outsider art evolved from the radical other that was of scientific interest only, to the Other that questions our perception. When Freud regarded art as a manifestation of the unconsciousness, he started breaching the wall between the “sane” artist and the insane patient. Visually, outsider art is often *unheimlich* in its pure sense: that what is repulsive yet familiar (Freud, 1955, p. 245). Rhodes explains that viewers respond to art by relating it to themselves and encounters with Otherness create stereotypes and normally serve to confirm one’s identity (Rhodes, 2000, p. 198). But the line between the self and the Other can shift, “adjusted according to changes in our perceptions” (Rhodes, 2000, p. 198).

The “postmodern condition” contests the borders that separate art and non-art: barriers between high and low, art and therapy, and art and life have been wiped out now (Zolberg & Cherbo, 2003, p. 4-5). Dualities such as insider versus outsider or mainstream versus niche have become increasingly problematic: the outsider might be on the inside, the niche can become hip. In the same sense, Jones et al. (2010, p. 75) refer to post-structuralism to emphasize that a single interpretation of an artwork is not possible because meaning emerges in the encounter of various interpretations. Growing aesthetical interest and appreciation brings outsider art to the point of challenging a fixed worldview. If one accepts the Other, that

one stops being the Other. Faced with art brut: “we occupy a special position, and may be seen as outsiders looking in on these singular worlds” (Murrell, 2006, p. 5). What role the postmodern condition plays in the framing of outsider art is an interesting question that Zolberg and Cherbo raised (Zolberg & Cherbo, 2003, p. 5).

*Je est un autre?* Certainly. This postmodern or deconstructivist approach to outsider art assumes that the viewer takes on the position of the outsider when he faces the artwork. The concept of otherness always entails a duality. It is impossible to think oneself without the other (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 3). And this conflicts of several meanings, wherein the radical otherness of the art works may root, cannot be solved easily and is expressed through the work (Macherey, 2008, p. 16).

In order to “understand” it, one has to accept and follow the (*il*)logics of the work. In a similar way, Lanoux (2006, p. 260) ascribes its disruptive force to the dissociation from signifier and signified he observes in the work of outsiders Théo Wagemann or Janko Domsic. In their works symbols as swastikas, hammer and sickles or dollar signs are used as naturally as stars and moons since the artist does not refer to their symbolic meaning.

French theorist Jacques Derrida’s critique of Immanuel Kant (author of the *The Critique of Pure Reason*) is revealing in the light of outsider art. Kant sees the logic of the work internal, while what is on the outside is mere decoration and the artwork is self-grounded, autonomous (Foster et al., 2004, p. 45). The judgment, “the outcome of the aesthetic experience, must be separate from ‘Reason’” (Foster et al., 2004, p. 45). The valuation of an artwork should thus not be linked to an extrinsic or outside context. A position that Derrida almost mocks: only because of the outside is the inside the inside (Foster et al., 2004, p. 45; Derrida, ,p.11). Pure inside does not exist. Applying Kantian aesthetics to outsider art means the artwork is independent, logical in its own logics (as, indeed, so many outsider artworks seem: desperately trying to be reasonable, sane), while Derrida denotes the impossibility of this singular view: the frame, the context defines its interior (*il*)logicality.

This elaboration and application of the post-structural theory adds to the idea of the inherent paradox of outsider art. Moreover, concepts of reason and madness or being inside or outside seem less one-dimensional from this point of view, as this condition has made singular interpretations almost impossible. To what extent this condition may have resulted in the acceptance of outsider art in the mainstream is a relevant question, and it poses the question if outsider art has remained inherently paradoxical during this apparent move.

In conclusion, outsider art has become increasingly popular and accepted since it has been established as an art genre or category (first as art brut by Jean Dubuffet and later as outsider art by Roger Cardinal). Nevertheless, the initial opposition to mainstream art has lost prominence, as the term became institutionalized and outsider artworks and artists found their way into museums and to the art market. This “threatened” its very nature and in this manner, outsider art and the way it is framed question how (contemporary) art and otherness are dealt with, and, generally speaking, how borders are set between art and non-art and within the art world, which leads us to the next chapter which broadens the view by bringing in sociological concepts that add to the understanding of art worlds and how diverging art fields or forms are seen, framed, recognized and accepted.

## **2.3 Sociological Study of Outsider Art**

While the previous part of this chapter introduced the creation and evolution of outsider art as a form of art with a contradictive relationship to contemporary and modern art, in this chapter this particular position will be approached from a sociological angle. To analyze this relation with the art world several sociological processes should be considered. If outsider art is not wholly accepted or more so, exists “thanks to” this dual position it is the result of processes of framing and legitimizing by different actors in the art field.

Therefore, a first part focuses on the ideas of the art field and art world that are essential to the understanding of the relationship within and between art forms. Next, the actors whose actions and discourses define and shape the relations will be described. These gatekeepers and intermediaries have a particular impact on the position of outsider art. Consequently, after the art viewer and the artists are discussed, concepts as framing are described because these show in practice how outsider art is dealt with, and which actions affect and define this position. Additionally, this enables me to place this case in a wider context of other art fields and processes. As sites of collective action (Baumann, 2006, p. 50) the outsider arts shares features with genres such as jazz or comics whose acceptance in the mainstream art world went through sometimes similar processes.

### **2.3.1 The Field of Cultural Production and Art Worlds**

#### **2.3.1.1 The Field of Cultural Production**

Outsider art is made, presented and viewed within the broader setting of the contemporary art world. The notions of outsider, mainstream or inclusion only make sense because of the

relations between different actors and the positions they uphold towards each other. Outsider art is “outside” because of, for example, the decision of a curator to contrast it with mainstream artworks, the refusal of a museum director to allow it in the museum’s collection or the focus that a studio coordinator puts on the fragility of the maker of the work.

In this view, Pierre Bourdieu’s theory on the field of cultural production is indispensable for this research. His theory goes against a purist view that would consider the artists as an independent creator of meaning. On the contrary, cultural products are created within a context of social and historical structures (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 188). This field is a network of objective relations between different actors, each one anew defined by its position in relation with the other positions (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 231). The field of cultural production is thus a complex structure where everything, everyone depends on the positioning of the other; and exists through its relation with other agents. Consequently, “every position, even the dominant one, depends for its very existence, and for the determinations it imposes on its occupants, on the other positions constituting the field” (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 312)<sup>4</sup>.

Artists, artworks, categories and genres all receive meaning through positioning within the field or (specific) art world in question. In result, the artist himself is made at the core of the field, by those who grant him the status of artist (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 167). In a comment on Bourdieu’s texts, Arthur Danto explains that being an artist means occupying a position “in the field known as the art world”, and as such being related to the positions of other actors such as art dealers, critics and curators (Danto, 2000, p. 216). Hence the question who is an artist or what is art can only be answered in relation to the specific field (Danto, 2000, p. 216).

Interestingly, Danto shows us Bourdieu’s position on the comparison of art(ists). At the time, the opening of the Musée D’Orsay gave way to indignation because in the museum, artists from greater and lesser renown were exhibited together. Bourdieu responded to this by claiming that greatness of specific artists is only possible in relation to the contemporaries that make up the field (Bourdieu in Danto, 2000, p. 216) and the juxtaposition of artists is relevant. I mention discussion because outsider art has been subject to controversies when the relevance of comparing it art to non-outsider art was questioned by critics reluctant to give up the autonomous status of regular art (Jones et al., 2010, p. 55).

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<sup>4</sup> With respect to Bourdieu’s notion of the social and power relationships exercised by and in the field of cultural production, these markers are not discussed in this research. I follow Danto’s observation about importance of the field of cultural production: even without focussing on social markers “the concept is of the very greatest value in thinking about transformations as well as the internal dialectics of positions” (Danto, 2000, p. 218). My research focuses on an in-group of professionals from a specific art field, not on their social positions.

The discourse of the critics, curators, and other actors that constitute the field are important factors that validate the position of cultural products: their critical discourse recognizes the work and at the same time legitimizes it as an object of discourse (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 317). Artworks are a manifestation of the field as a whole in which all powers and the positions of other (legitimizing) actors are concentrated (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 319).

Michael Mauws' (Mauws, 2000) study on decision-making processes on cultural products elaborates the role of discourse in the constitution of the field. He shows why some cultural products get picked up or chosen from the supply stream, pointing out the relation between quality and success is not the key factor that guides cultural production (Mauws, 2000, p. 230). Using discourse analysis, this study does not regard cultural products as entities in the field but as processes that are socially constructed, supported and reconstructed: between creation and consumption, many factors influence on the product's position (Mauws, 2000, p. 232). A cultural product is thus not finished by its maker or fixed within a specific genre as it is subject to ongoing social processes.

The field of cultural production is thus a basic element of this research, as outsider art, as any other form of art, is part of a wider field wherein the artists, their artworks and the other actors position themselves. Outsiders or, as Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 342) calls them, naives might be outside when they are creating, but as soon as they are perceived by other actors, they enter the field regardless of the creator's own notion of the field. So, an outsider is an artist who has no dominant position within the field, and contrary to almost all other actors, has no knowledge of the field and the positioning going on.

A similar position is upheld by Danto, who sees taking position in the field as a strategic process outsider do not actively take part in:

The power of the field as a coefficient of artistic creativity may be underscored by the fact that outsiders have no perceivable artistic merit until the field admits their work somewhere into the structure because enfranchised artists find ways of using folk art, children's art, the art of outsiders, and the like. (Danto, 2000, p. 218)

The legitimization of an art form can occur in retrospect, possibly incited by social change within society (Janssen & Verboord, 2015, p. 11). In the cases of Wölfli and Henry Darger, whose art mostly got included in the category of (outsider) art after their deaths, the works

were not “‘ripe’ for discovery” until influential artistic elites were ready to appreciate and recognize them as artworks (Alan Fine, 2004, p. 97).

Unlike Dadaism or Pop-art (two movements that have challenged the field), outsider artists have no knowledge of the field mechanisms. Their challenging position can only be the result of the valuing or appropriation efforts of other actors.

This research, focuses on the different actors (such as curators and museum directors) who exercise influence within the field and play a big part in the positing within the field. I will look, as Mauws (2000) did, on how through the discourse of these actors positions are created and contested. Furthermore, as I study the relations of outsider art vis-a-vis other art forms, I employ the concept of the field as a bigger frame wherein different (dominant) art forms are defined in relation to each other.

### 2.3.1.2 Art Worlds

Another crucial theory that describes the site of cultural production as an ecosystem of collective actions is Howard Becker’s concept of art worlds (Becker, 1982).

The first steps towards an institutional description were undertaken by Danto (1964) who described art worlds as a group of institutions that identify objects as art (Bundegaard, 2011, p. 4). Only within certain contexts, settings and constellations of people, objects become a piece of art and only for as long as the conditions are fulfilled. Dickie elaborated on this idea, by stating that only members of the art world are able to reach an institutional consensus of what art is (Dickie in Bundegaard, 2011, p. 4).

This institutional framework, that served as a base for Becker’s concept of multiple art worlds, is very useful in this thesis research: items can receive different meanings depending on the setting: a creation by a mental patient can perfectly be a tool for a psychiatrist in the “psychiatric world”, but become a work of art in the outsider art world. Yet as soon as the object enters another art world, it might not be art anymore, as other frames are used there.

Becker defined art worlds as the whole of “all people whose activities are necessary to the production of the characteristic works which that world, and perhaps many others as well, define as art” (Becker, 1982, p. 34). They are an established network of relations between people whose collective actions lead to consensus of what is art. Art is thus a joint creation (Becker, 1976, p. 703). Art worlds are supported by shared conventions and defined by the workings of groups with different interests. This collective action creates a shared sense of the value of what is produced (Becker, 1976, p. 704).

Becker sees outsiders as artists who break the conventions of an art world, but are not aware of the existing schemes their art doesn't respect as they lack training that taught them the customs (Becker, 1976, p. 709). Artists such as Facticeur Cheval or Grandma Moses were treated as madmen, according to Becker, because they did not master the vocabulary of the art world to talk about their creations and they were ridiculed as outsiders because they did not meet the conventional image of an artist (Becker, 1976, p. 713).

This theory disregards that outsider art has inherent characteristics; its distinguishing features exist solely in relation with other art worlds. Becker posed a recurring question in my research: what happens when naive art is accepted within museum walls (Becker, 1976, p. 714)? Without entirely answering the question, he gave two possibilities: if the artists remains unaware of the constraints of the art world, he stays naive, if he cooperates, this art world stretches its boundaries to adapt and integrate the newcomer (Becker, 1976, p. 714).

For this thesis, the concept of art worlds shows that artworks can have different meanings according to the context wherein they are seen because different art worlds function according to their own codes. I regard outsider art as a separate art world and research how the borders of this art world are set and (maybe) intentionally crossed. For instance, inclusion in the mainstream would imply that the outsider and the contemporary art world increasingly share features, something that will be questioned in the empirical research.

In short, I use both concepts of the field theory in order to research the relations between actors that constitute the field and the art world to study the existing codes within (institutional) constellations of people that define what art is what not.

## **2.3.2 The Actors: Gatekeepers, Intermediaries, Artists and Art Viewers**

### **2.3.2.1 The Trajectory**

Looking at the field of cultural production as described above, a next point to focus on are the intermediaries that occupy various functions within these fields. Between the production of cultural goods and the production of taste at the level of the audience, gatekeepers such as publishers, gallery owners, critics and curators influence the processes (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 232.). As they perform different actions with different outcomes, the role of these gatekeepers and mediators is thus not singular (Janssen & Verboord, 2015, p. 1).

Their power resides in their possession of economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 318). The extent to which they can exercise any critical power over and within the field depends both on their capital and on their positioning within this

field, allowing them to exercise their power and accept or reject certain products (Stewart, 2014, p. 65).

Janssen and Verboord point out several roles that are important in the framework of this research and differentiate between the roles that “tastemakers”, “gatekeepers”, “surrogate customers” or “cultural mediators” can perform: they can (1) select, (2) edit and co-create to adapt the product to the next gatekeepers in line, (3) connect them with other actors, (4) sell or market to the audience, (5) distribute, (6) evaluate and classify, or even (7) censor certain works (Janssen & Verboord, 2015, p. 3-8). In this way, the path from the creation of a work of art to being considered so by particular audience leads along a trajectory with many possible (sub)steps. Some mediators can perform several roles: a curator can select a work and create a discourse around it to connect it with other actors within the museum field.

Relevant for this thesis research are the stages of selection of artworks, the way they are connected to peers or other significant actors and finally how gatekeepers value and classify art works and genres. These stages refer to the selection of artworks from the huge supply that exists (Janssen & Verboord, 2015, p. 4). How this happens and to what extent this process differs when it comes to outsider art is a question for the present study. These selection streams from producer to consumer can be regulated by a “throughput” sector of organizations that select and filter the supply of goods (Hirsch, 1972, p. 3). Within the art world, galleries function as vehicle supporting this stream of creation, circulation and consumption of artistic products (Joy, 1998, p. 8). This is, on the one hand, a competition between the goods to be selected and, on the other hand, an effort from the organizations to set up a line of “check points” that a cultural product has to pass in order to exist or reach the audience (Hirsch, 1972, p. 19). Though Hirsch focuses on commercial distributors, he shows how mediators act within a field where all actions are interconnected and products indeed have to pass along a trajectory .

In the same sense, it seems as if the mediators also “create”, as their selection of certain outsider artworks within the art field lead to these works “becoming art”. These decisions have to be considered within an institutional framework because mediators base their own decisions on “institutional knowledge”, “contextual information” and “their classification into particular genres” they get from other actors from the field and their professional peers (Janssen & Verboord, 2015, p. 9).

In the case of outsider art, the question arises how the different steps relate to each other: selection seems of key importance, while for a long time the marketing or distributing



seemed of a lesser importance, though this might have changed now that outsider art is included in the international art market (Zolberg & Cherbo, 2003, p. 4).

### 2.3.2.2 Curators, Directors and Critics

In the next section, I focus on important gatekeepers from the field of outsider art, mainly curators, museum directors and critics, and zoom in on their workings and influence.

When it comes to the role of the curator as a gatekeeper or mediator, it is important to realise curatorship includes many functions nowadays. In line with Janssen & Verboord's (2015) findings, this goes from being a selector and interpreter of artworks to being a producer, exhibition planner, organizer, project manager or educator. Moreover, many of the museum directors I interview started as curators or combine their management function with curatorship. Historically, to curate stems from the Latin word *curare* – to take care of - which, interestingly, was used for a person that took care of, for example, lunatics (George, 2015, p. 2). We can see three dimensions in the practice of a curator: there is the role of selector or gatekeepers, the practical and decisional role that is performed through organizing and actions, and finally the role of producer of textual discourse that accompanies artworks, artists and exhibitions (George, 2015, p. 2-3, 17). With regards to outsider art, I underwrite an inclusive (and contemporary) view on the workings of the curator, thus including all different forms of curatorship that are available in the field.

The impact of critics, media and academia as “legitimizing” gatekeepers needs to be recognized as well, as these actors can use their authority to create labels and possibly new classifications (Janssen & Verboord, 2015, p. 7). Their endorsements influence the behavior and the taste of audiences (Janssen & Verboord 2015, p. 12) and Debenedetti (in Janssen & Verboord, 2015, p. 13) has showed that, in the film sector, unknown genres and products rely heavily on critical acclaim to be acknowledged. These actors are no active focus of my research (I do not interview them), but I include them here because they influence the other actors through their framing and selection.

Referring to Bourdieu, Heinich claims that intermediaries also help to bridge the gap with the audience that surged when the art world became more autonomous (Heinich, 2012, p. 5). In result, the number of intermediaries has grown in the contemporary art world where the autonomy of art seems total. Indeed, without the frame (i.e. the gallery or the accompanying text) many artworks might not be considered art in the first place. Yet, the question can be posed if the if mediators are effectively bridging the gap or if they are creating distance

between the art world and the normal world?<sup>5</sup> Because one can assume that the trajectory and chain of mediators grant more autonomy to the artworks (Joy, 1998, p. 4).

In outsider art these processes are also indispensable for the inclusion of the works into the art world. Here, Heinich's approach seems promising as she says that the workings of mediators offer the perfect scope for sociological investigations (Heinich, 2012, p. 10). Indeed, the "genre"-specific actions of these intermediaries are a focus of this research. Both the concrete actions they perform to get outsider art to museum walls will be discussed as well as how they exert their influence to legitimize outsider art as art.

### 2.3.2.3 Galleries and Museums

The discussed actors relevant to this research mainly operate within established institution and organizations. Therefore, I also look at the distinctions and characteristics of the different institutions where outsider art is displayed.

Museum and galleries are places with a strong social function to help recognize art as something separate from the other aspects of society (Joy, 1998, p. 10). In a museum the perception of a work of art in a purely aesthetical way is facilitated, as there it finds the context to be related to other works of its class without being considered a functionalist representation or an everyday object by the competent art viewer (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 40).

Briefly stated, museum history can be divided in two periods: before the eighteenth century no distinctions between genres or schools were applied to collecting and exhibiting, whereas afterwards an unstoppable movement towards (often spatial) classifications in schools, genres and forms has been occurring (Bann, 1998, p. 231). Indeed, to categorize, classify and order the world according to certain schemes and thus exercise power over the display and the visitor have become classical functions of museums (Lord, 2006, p. 2). Museums and galleries are spaces of classifications and interpretation wherein art objects are institutionalized within art history, with the difference that museums are more permanent and galleries play a more transitory role (Joy, 1998, p. 10).

Another characteristic of the museum is the linear narrative that is forced upon the visitor in a so-called narrative machinery (Bennet, 1995, p. 181). In the museum space a meaningful organization takes place; the order of things and the position of the people in relation to this order are set out (Bennet in Pang Kah Meng, 2004, p. 33). Nevertheless, the

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<sup>5</sup> This question relates to Paul Virilio's writings about the role of the screen that does not help to bring the viewer closer to what he sees but adds a level of virtuality to his experience (Friedberg, 2004, p. 184).

museum space is under constant transformation and is, for example, increasingly regarded as a space that questions ownership and the role of the visitors as producers of meaning rather than receptors of the imposed order (Bharucha, 2014, p. 135).

Within art worlds, museums are of great importance because they provide physical and symbolic resources of the highest level: they not only control the value, visibility and survival of cultural products, it is literally decided on their walls who or what enters art worlds (Baumann, 2007, p. 56). A similar amount of resources within art worlds is only found in high status art galleries (Baumann, 2007, p. 56), though both internally and externally, museums are likely to have a higher standing and impact.

In the case of abstract expressionism, Bystryn found out how artworks had to pass through the “filter” of specific galleries before entering the doors of prominent museums of modern art (Mauws, 2000, p. 233; Bystryn, 1978, p. 405). This raises the questions whether other (visual art) genres have to follow a similar prescribed trajectory as well, or whether specific genres operate in specific ways, and more so what the role of the spaces is for outsider art, an art form with a dual relationship with institutionalization.

Galleries play different roles, as they exhibit, sell, support research and help to spread ideas in society (Joy, 1998, p. 9). Aided by affiliated curators, they function as way stations where cultural meaning gets transferred (McCracken in Joy, 1998, p. 8). Joy differentiates between commercial galleries whose primary mandate is to sell art and parallel galleries that combine this with promoting art that might be up-and-coming or unknown and reconstruct what is acceptable in art (Joy, 1998, p. 18, 25). In result, parallel galleries aim at a wider audience than art collectors and dealers and they help to establish new art styles as they are often among the first ones to exhibit and promote these art forms (Joy, 1998, p. 49).

Considering outsider art, several aspects are relevant. In the first place, institutions are sites that give legitimacy to emerging genres. We can indeed observe that the growing interest for outsider art was followed by the foundation of various museums. The fact that many emerged close to or as part of mental health facilities might show that, and this is the second point, the main focus of these institutions was dual. Indeed, just as parallel galleries try to create awareness, it is a relevant question how the social background of outsider art museums influences their position: not at the heart of the contemporary art world but in between two worlds, and how the social and the artistic relate to each other.

For the galleries and studios, the same questions apply. Several of them are closely related to psychiatric hospitals (such as Galerie Atelier Herenplaats and Kunsthuis Yellow Art

that are part of this study) so it is interesting to see if the directors differentiate between the commercial and parallel roles and social responsibility and aesthetic quality in their workings.

### **2.3.3 The Art Viewer**

#### 2.3.3.1 Aesthetic Dispositions

Additionally, we need to look at what happens at the level of the persons confronted with outsider art, that also play an important role in processes of framing or legitimization. Legitimization of art worlds happens on the external dimensions as well, as the viewers have to accept the art they encounter (Baumann, 2007, p. 49). And the viewers, consequently, are influenced by the framing actions of the gatekeepers who came before them in the trajectory.

But art viewers are not neutral; they are disposed by their surroundings and social conditions (Bourdieu in Daenekindt & Roose, 2014, p. 2). Daenekindt and Roose (2014, p. 6-7) researched the different aesthetic dispositions of museum visitors, based on their expectations of the arts. The researchers refer to Bourdieu's idea of the aesthetic disposition that becomes institutionalized in museums, where form is favored over function (Bourdieu in Daenekindt & Roose, 2014, p. 3). As a result, this disposition enables them to view artworks in another way than everyday reality (Daenekindt & Roose, 2014, p. 5).

In order to describe how viewers relate to art the reference is often made to the aesthetic experience. This experience could reside in the appreciation of the form, as formalist argue (Bell, 2011, p. 262). A more expressionist approach sees the expression of emotions and the contentious reflection on this expression as the a way to this experience (Collingwood, 2011, p. 285-286).

To speak of an aesthetic experience, Monroe Beardsley has isolated five conditions (he says number one is crucial and if three out of the other four are present, we can speak of an aesthetic experience): (1) object focus: the viewer wants to give attention to the artwork, (2) felt freedom: the viewer feels free as everyday concerns are absent, (3) detached affect: the experience is reflected upon at the spot, and not seen or felt as literal, (4) active discovery: the viewer engages cognitively with the artwork, and (5) wholeness: the viewer experiences a feeling of integration afterwards (in Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990, p. 7). We can assume that the aesthetic disposition and experience are closely related, in the sense that the experience requires a certain disposition from the viewer that has to be facilitated by the museum context or the institutional framework that helps to "create" art (Duncan, 2006, p. 11), as discussed in the past section.

In the frame of this study, these theories help to define the circumstances for audience research. As said, the appreciation of outsider art has evolved from a functional to a more formal one. This aesthetic view should thus be favored by the museum context, and one of the angles of this audience research is to see if the same holds for outsider art or whether the viewer bends towards a more socially colored disposition independent of the context.

### 2.3.3.2 Prior Audience Research

The majority of the visitors of *The Art of Making Sense* that exhibited over seventy artworks of the Cunningham Dax Collection and focused on the different facets of this art made by mental patients, described it as “very emotional” and “intense”; moreover, visitors that were “experienced arts industry” participants said that they felt more emotional than during visits to other arts exhibitions but that they would have liked to see it in a regular museum (Jones et al., 2010, p. 54). So, the medical context and the actual location can influence and determine the way people perceive outsider art.

White, Kaufman and Riggs (2014, p. 145), researchers from the field of psychology, conducted research that studied the audience reactions to outsider art. They showed paintings of a wide range of artists going from extreme outsiders (convicted serial killers and prison inmates) to eminent artists to a group of respondents who rated the works on three dimensions: warmth, creativity and likeability. Artworks made by serial killers and inmates scored lowest, while “average-deviant” art scored highest, showing there is a certain appreciation of outsider art for its originality and creativity but a resistance to the darker elements of it (White, Kaufman & Riggs, 2014, p. 149).

From a social point of view, Fox and Macpherson stress that the presentation of art and performances by learning-disabled artists (or so called inclusive artists; what the researchers see as a subgroup of outsider art) can serve as a motor of social change on the one hand, and as a way to make audiences familiar with otherness in an artistic context (Fox & Macpherson, 2015, p. 20).

Nevertheless, several outsider art exhibitions and publications are a double-edged sword: not only do they create awareness, but they might as well be sites that add to the marginalization of mental patients on different levels, as results of audience research show that the artists lose agency in the eyes of the public (Ross, 2008, p. 92).

More broad, a recent study showed how the Bourdieuan concept of the charismatic ideology influences heavily on the positive appreciation of artworks (Berghman & van Eijk, 2016), and the biography and background information on the artists play an important role.

My research takes in consideration these findings but also aims at filling a gap in the existing research. A main focus is whether outsider art is viewed and experienced differently from contemporary art and if other (e)valuation criteria are expressed by the viewers, where, again, the social versus the artistic value comes in. So I will study if viewers differentiate between outsider art and non-outsider art, and how they relate to the social aspects of the art while in prior research the comparisons have been rather limited and by comparing their views to the ones from professionals, I aim at painting a broader picture of the field.

### **2.3.4 The Outsider Artist: A Sociological Other**

In reference to the post-structural discussion on the Other in the previous chapter, there is also a sociological approach to this other that can broaden the scope of this research. From a sociological point of view, the position of outsiders has been discussed by Georg Simmel. I include his views on society (Simmel & Hughes, 1949, p. 254) and the outsider as they add to this research that tries to bridge aesthetic theory and sociology.

In this research there is less attention for the outsider artists that may find themselves excluded from the regular art world because of their social position, as a mental patient, a self-taught artists or a recluse. Yet, they occupy a position that is closely related to the other actors in the field and therefore relevant to mention.

Simmel discusses a peculiar figure in his description of society: the stranger who is neither fully inside nor outside of the core group made up by individuals bound by mutual interests (Simmel, 1950, p. 403). This stranger “may be a member of a group in a *spatial* sense but still not be a member of the group in a *social* sense; [...] a person may be *in* the group but not *of it*”<sup>6</sup> (Dale McLemore, 1970, p. 86). In result, he is not bound to the same rules as the others (Simmel, 1950, p. 405).<sup>7</sup> This position has an interesting duality: both in- and outside, accepted to a degree, but in the unique position to do things an insider cannot do.

Is this relationship to the group, exemplified by a certain (but non-descript) measure of nearness and distance (Simmel, 1950, p. 407), not similar to the position of the outsider artist?

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<sup>6</sup> All italics in the original.

<sup>7</sup> This recalls the figure of the jester who was part of the court and yet was free to speak his mind about the other court members in a way that would have cost them their heads.

One foot in and one out of the art world; not constrained by its rules, yet not fully accepted. In fact, being a stranger is the only possibility for outsider artists: if they are fully accepted, they become regular artists (e.g. a well-known artist that suffers from mental distress), and in the opposite case their works are not considered art (e.g. therapeutic pastime for a patient).

As outsider art is often familiarly strange, Simmel's words about the stranger apply as well: "his position in this [new] group is determined, essentially, by the fact that he has not belonged to it from the beginning, that he imports qualities into it, which do not and cannot stem from the group itself" (Simmel, 1950, p. 403).

The relevance for my research lies in the supposed similarity between the position of the stranger in a social group and an outsider artist in a contemporary art world, that again mirrors the duality of outsider art, and shows the tension between inclusion and rejection within the art world as a characteristic.

#### **2.3.4 Framing Processes**

After discussing the different actors in the art field that figure in this study, I focus on the concrete actions of the gatekeepers that are studied in the empirical research, specifically the framing of outsider art within the art field and vis-a-vis other art worlds. In order to do this, I describe what framing is and how what role it plays in the perception of outsider art.

Historically speaking, the act of framing paintings underwent an important change when canvas became the principal support for paintings, replacing the wooden panels that were used before. Since then paintings were framed after completion (Sale & Wilcox, 2016). And post-Renaissance paintings were not framed by the painter anymore (Sale & Wilcox, 2016) so others could influence the presentation in a different way as the painter had intended it. Moreover, today curators have more freedom to change the frame of paintings according to how they want to present it.

The actual act of framing paintings, and art more generally is an interesting metaphor for the framing by the actors in the art field that influence on how the artworks are seen, presented and interpreted. The frame of an artworks sets the border between what is in and what is out (Joy, 1998, p. 3). It designs what is seen, what is not to be looked. Framing is an act that filters, selects, includes, and rejects because every inclusion means exclusion (Joy, 1998, p. 3). Framing creates a narrative that always has insiders and outsiders (Baumann, 2007, p. 61). In contemporary art, playing with the duality of the frame has become a topic (Joy, 1998, p. 4); because the frame is often what decides upon the fate of what is inside.

Framing is thus no objective nor innocent act as it is an activity that aims at convincing audience members about how to derive a correct meaning through conscious and strategic efforts (Snow in Baumann, 2007, p. 57).

For Becker (Becker in Mauws, 2000, p. 235), genre is one of the most important framing devices within the cultural industries. The use of its conventions, rules and limitations aid in streamlining the flow from production to consumption as “[c]ultural products that do not readily fit into the established genres present decision makers with greater ambiguity and, as a result, require a greater effort in arriving at an evaluation” (Mauws, 2000, p. 235).

Framing refers thus to all actions undertaken by parties involved in the production and reception of artworks and includes the labeling, the defining of the genre, the acceptance or rejection of an artwork in a certain context. As framing always entails the (re)placement of boundaries between in and out, it is a key element of the establishment of the “genre” outsider art in the art world and the specific way of dealing with artworks that qualify as such.

Besides genre, framing can be (but is not limited to) name giving of exhibitions, spatial situation of exhibitions or the way certain artworks are depicted. In the United States, for example, folk art has been framed by curators, critics and gallery owners as the authentic art, just because the artists were said to be untrained, ingenuous and not interested in the financial rewards of their work (Ardery, 1997, p. 344). But ambiguous effects can also arise due to framing as outsider art projects or publications that aim at adding to the understanding of mental health issues, might unwontedly be perceived as stigmatizing (Ross, 2015, p. 89).

As the discussion of the field of cultural production has showed, the position of outsider art is the result of the positioning of various gatekeepers and intermediaries. Framing is a key concept of this research: instead of looking for purist characteristics of outsider art the focus lies on how the gatekeepers position it in relationship with the whole art field. Though this happens on many levels (discursive, spatial, etc) this research studies the discursive framing as this is what the aforementioned actors actively do to exert their role within the field, get their views across and position outsider art.

### **2.3.6 Receiving Legitimacy**

Before coming to the research question of this thesis, I introduce the concept of legitimacy that is relevant to the framing of outsider art and its relation as an art world with other art worlds. With all previously discussed concepts in mind, this part serves as a step-up to the research question that follows.



Legitimacy is received on the external level: for example the growing appreciation of outsider art itself within the art field (e.g. The Heritage Amsterdam opening the Outsider Art Museum). On the internal level, several actors serve as gatekeepers whose actions can grant or take away legitimacy of within an art world. This happens both within the outsider art world itself, as with outsider art that has to pass certain “barriers” before being accepted as contemporary art, as in the case of Henry Darger whose work is now in the MoMA collection.

Shyon Baumann showed how the new and unaccepted within art worlds go through a process similar to the one of social movements to become accepted (Baumann, 2007, p. 61). Consensus has to be reached in function of each situation, but not on the level of the whole society (Zelditch in Baumann, 2007, p. 49). When applying this idea to art worlds, legitimacy can be reached, for instance, on the internal level constituted by critics, professionals and scholars if they come to a minimal agreement about a new object or artist, and on the external level if, afterwards, the audience accepts this. The actors, before defined as gatekeepers and mediators, thus not only select and process but assign value to cultural goods (Baumann, 2007, p. 51), as their position in the field gives them authority to do so (Janssen & Verboord, 2015, p. 7). Moreover, these actors can employ structural and symbolic tools to grant legitimacy (Baumann, 2007, p. 55). Structural tools can be practical resources ranging from exhibition spaces, funds for fancy invitations and staff while symbolic elements include museum collaborations and endorsements from well-known artists that grant prestige.

Yet, exogenous factors also influence the legitimization of art worlds and DiMaggio’s concept of “opportunity spaces” is relevant here, as these refer to the impact of societal circumstances (Baumann, 2007, p. 53). For outsider art, as described in the theoretic framework, the decreasing stigmatization of mental health patients and the openness in contemporary art for new form were needed to open the field for outsider art to be accepted.

Finally, Baumann elaborates on the discussed concept of framing: he sees it as an element of legitimization processes, preceded by ideology and followed by discourse. The first refers to, for example, fixed ideas of what is good or bad in art, while framing is the way this ideology is applied by someone with a specific interest, and this, finally, is done employing a specific discourse (Baumann, 2007, p. 59). Framing thus calls upon pre-existing values and ideas (Baumann, 2007, p. 60). For example, a curator can frame a specific outsider artists as someone who leads the viewer to unknown worlds, thereby using a typical Romantic discourse of the artist as a mad genius. Yet, that framing is only one way of seeing, shows De Cleene and Van Goidshoven’s observation that outsider art as a genre can be seen as a

contemporary myth (De Cleene & Van Goidshoven, 2013, p. 21) that exaggerates the assumption of authentic artists.

Concluding, this last section shows that the position of outsider art in the art world is defined by the actions of gatekeepers curators, critics and museum directors who have specific interest and frame outsider art in different ways. They strategically use symbolic and structural tools that help outsider art to be seen as, for instance, contemporary art. The roles as spaces such as museums and galleries have a key role here, as they create the right context, a context that influences on the disposition of the art viewer as well.

With the theoretic descriptions of these concepts, I can formulate my research question, show how I came to it, and how I want to elaborate it in order to assure the relevance of the research within framework I have set out.

## **2.4 The Research Question, Subquestions & Expectations**

### **2.4.1 Formulating a Research Question**

In the prior parts, I have developed a view on outsider art as a challenge to the way art is experienced through an extensive introduction to its history. Theoretically, the paradoxical nature of outsider art as art that has to be “out” to be “in” is apparent. Thanks to the description of the sociological concepts the view is broadened and framing and legitimacy have been identified as key elements to this research.

We have seen that the paradoxical position of outsider is also a social construction: as outsider art has moved into the mainstream areas such as art fairs, galleries and dedicated museums, a part of what made outsider art an “outsider” in the first place is not valid anymore which complicates the use of the term and its position.

In this view, explicit examples of outsider art “invading” classical art territories prove to be an interesting case, as art critic Richard Dorment’s harsh critique of the exhibition *Inner Worlds Outside* (2006) shows: “a wicked, pernicious exhibition based on a false premise and proselytising for an evil idea. What is objectionable is to present the art of people with severe mental illness alongside the work of Francis Bacon, Joan Miró or Francis Picabia and then to propose that there is no essential difference [...] is utterly ridiculous” (Dorment in Jones et al., 2010, p. 55). Indeed, moving towards the mainstream doesn’t go without a shrug.

Nevertheless, other voices have said that nowadays outsider art has become just another category within the art world and should be treated as such (MacLagan, 2009, p. 17). This goes in line with the idea that the original outsider art had its peak before Jean Dubuffet

coined the term art brut and all contemporary creators make no pure outsider art, as they are affected by the outside world. Outsider art would in this sense be a category that can be historically and formally defined. But this brings the question to how all new outsider art is dealt with, as it situates itself in-between the two worlds.

Finally, these paradoxes bring the focus back to the question posed at the very beginning: what is it that makes outsider art different? Are viewers being fooled if they admire an artwork made by a mental patient without knowing his background? Or is this difference just forced upon the viewer? Rather than trying to give a definitive answer and define outsider art, I look at how actors in the field deal with it and how they resolve the paradox in practice and frame outsider art in relation to other art and its historical evolution.

#### **2.4.2 The Research Question**

To operationalize the theoretical assumptions, firsts, a definition of outsider art, as it is going to be used in the framework of this thesis research has to be settled. This definition builds on the descriptions of outsider art by the scholars MacLagan (MacLagan, 2009) and Rhodes (Rhodes, 2010) who define outsider art mainly on sociological terms. These descriptions are inclusive, in the sense that they do not aim to pinpoint certain elements but rather set out a frame.

Outsider art is the art made by persons that to a certain degree detached from mainstream society. Their art production is not the result of formal training, the artists are often self-taught and their art does not position itself vis-a-vis art history or other painters and is not intended at any possible audience. Outsider art has no formal prerequisites or restrictions. The name outsider art is applied to the creation by somebody alien to the work, i.e. a gatekeeper that has certain authority within the mainstream art world, and the same applies for the use of the term outsider artist.

This definition brings me to the following research question:

*How is outsider art framed by gatekeepers and audiences in the art field and how do these different actors deal with its inherently paradoxical nature as it moves into the mainstream?*

These different actors are in the first place the ones that decide over the fate of outsider art, the gatekeepers. These gatekeepers include curators, (outsider art) museum directors, (outsider) art gallery owners, and (outsider) art studio directors. As selecting actors, they decide on how outsider art is literally and figuratively framed in their institutions and presented to the art world: they decide what is in and what is not (Joy, 1998, p. 3). Referring to the theoretical chapter, framing is not just an act but rather a trajectory of filtering, selection, inclusion, and rejection (Joy, 1998, p. 3). Framing is creating a narrative around different artworks, artists or categories, in relationship to others.

These choices and words determine how outsider art is positioned, shown, and consequently perceived by the art viewers. This is the second group of actors who engage in this process and are to some degree influenced by the gatekeepers.

As the theoretical research has shown that outsider art transgresses known categories (Foster, 2001, p. 3) and its effects can be disturbing (Šafářová & Zemánková, 2006, p. 238) or scary and shocking (Gille, 2006, p. 248), a second focus of the research is whether the paradoxical nature of outsider art plays a role in this framing, and if so, how? Inclusion and exclusion are not only characteristics of framing, they are main closely related to the dual position of outsider art.

Since outsider art cannot be identified by its formal aspects, naturally, it is important to designate and use the label of outsider art actively during the research. Hereby, it is to be noted that this thesis research uses outsider art, but other terms such as art brut or self-taught art have to be taken in account as well. The question is not how viewers can discern a painting by Edvard Munch from a painting by Adolf Wölfli. Instead, the focus is on how the outsider art characteristics are at play. Therefore, I rely on the discourse and include a more experimental part in the research methodology through the use of visual stimuli.

### **2.4.3 Sidesteps and Subquestions**

The core of the question is if outsider art is framed as fundamentally different from other art or if the similarity is stressed. Both the social and aesthetic sides to this question are addressed in this research.

One of the questions following from this is to what extent the empirical results confirm that outsider art has moved into the mainstream, a finding from Zolberg & Cherbo (Zolberg & Cherbo, 2003, p. 2), discussed in chapter 2.2.1 of the theoretical research. This mainstream can take different forms including established institutions and galleries.

Consequently, to what extent the paradoxical nature of outsider art confirmed, negated or employed by the actors in these framing processes is another question. Are the actors actively employing or negating the frame of genre (Mauws, 2000, p. 235), in this case outsider art, and to what ends?

Another question is if and on which level consensuses (Baumann, 2007, p. 49) on the position of outsider art are reached and to what effect. Possible oppositions or comparisons between outsider art and other forms of art made by the actors can give insight in the way they frame outsider art. Furthermore, the use of visual stimuli can shed light on the discourse used by art viewers .

Another subquestion is whether significant differences can be observed between the different actors, according to the roles they fulfill in the field of outsider art. Can we indeed, as Janssen en Verboord did, observe different roles and functions of mediators (Janssen & Verboord, 2015, p. 8)? And, is there a so-called trajectory, from the creators over a series of gatekeepers to the art viewers, as described in subsection 2.3.2.1, and what is its effect?

This brings us to the discussion on legitimacy and if outsider art has to struggle to receive this? And if the gatekeepers recognize certain “opportunity spaces” (DiMaggio in Baumann, 2007, p. 53) that play or played a role for outsider art?

Finally, I will see if significant differences between the different types of gatekeepers I have identified before (such as museum professionals versus gallery owner or studio directors versus curators) and between the Belgian and Dutch gatekeepers emerge from the research.

#### **2.4.4 Expectations**

Has outsider art become just another label? At this point of the research, this seems a correct assumption if one means with this that it enters the contemporary art world and its museums. During the research period, *The Museum of Everything* opened at the Rotterdam Kunsthall, where outsider art was exhibited together with contemporary artworks, in an effort to expose the similarities between both, while in Belgium, for example, the *Middle gate '13* project had brought outsider and non-outsider artists together, throwing up question on similarity, difference and normality.

Nevertheless, I foresee that there will be inclusion only until a certain point: outsider art might apparently have become mainstream, as a hybrid art form, its origins lie elsewhere, as discussed in the first chapter, historically, appreciation has been mostly for social reasons. In this sense, I suspect that the framing of outsider art will always be ambiguous: even though

it enters regular art museums and galleries, I foresee that it will not be treated along the same lines as other art because professionals focus on the multiple (social, aesthetic, etc) dimensions of the presentation, as described by Jones et al. (2010, p. 6) during past research.

This idea is grounded in the idea that the paradoxical nature of outsider art is at the same moment a point of attraction and rejection for professionals (Allegaert & Marius, 2013, p. 52): they cannot unconditionally accept outsider art in their world as this would mean outsider art has ceased to exist. Therefore, next to the confirmation of its ambiguity, I expect that the name can be at times used for its exotic or commercial attractiveness; as a brand, as MacLagan noted when he referred to the “crisis point” (MacLagan, 2009, p. 170).

Moreover, I expect a difference in the framing by curators that put outsider art on display in specialized exhibitions, mixed thematic exhibitions or in non-outsider art museums, as they might depart from a different perspective about the role and position of outsider art within or opposed to the art world. Professionals from the outsider art could be more inclined to include outsider art within the art world. Yet, according to De Cleene & Van Goidshoven’s (2013, p. 21) and Ardery’s (1997, p. 344) findings, other professionals might rather present outsider art in an exotic way, as something special or “authentic”.

Regarding the galleries, I expect that most gallery owners or directors that exhibit and even sell outsider art will behave like “parallel” galleries (Joy, 1998, p. 49) in the sense that their main mission is to promote this form of art and create awareness, over the commercial goals of other galleries. Additionally, their focus is likely to be more of a mix between artistic and social preoccupations. However, a question is to which point this can be met with certain commercial obligations the galleries have, as opposed to art studios.

From the side of the art viewers the context of the interview might influence as well on their perception of outsider art. I expect that visitors of museums located in former hospitals (as the Museum Dr. Guislain) or with a strong social dimension will not regard the outsider art in a purely formal way, assuming that the aesthetic disposition (Bourdieu in Daenekindt & Roose, 2014, p. 3) might be more present with visitors of outsider art exhibitions in modern art museums or exhibitions and they might have stronger, even emotional, reactions to it. In similar vein, I expect the professionals from museum with a social dimension to focus more on the social over the aesthetic side of the art they show.

Finally, and in line with this, I expect a strong presence of social awareness in the professionals that advocate the inclusion of outsider art in the mainstream, and I suspect they

will support the appreciation of art made by marginalized persons, based on similar findings by Jones et al. (2010, p. 54), for ethical and social reasons..

#### **2.4.5 The Greater Goal**

The aim of this research is multiple. It will add experimental study results to the discussion about the position of outsider art. There is a vast theoretical base for this discussion, but more empirical studies that focus on the framing and perception of outsider art can definitely bring new elements to the debate. It is the aim to apply aesthetical theories to outsider art as this art challenges basic assumptions of how art is perceived, and in result, I believe, this study might add to this already extensive field. Looking at these artworks entails social, historical, ethical, moral and aesthetical questions that enrich and complicate the perception of the viewer.

Aside from this, another challenge is to see if a part of the post-structural theory (that can be, well, highly abstract) the research relies on can be used to lead to empirical results. In short, this research aims to be a nexus between different fields of interests, that, hopefully, can mutually be enriched.

## **3 METHODS AND DATA**

### **3.3 Research Design**

As the research question of my thesis explicitly enquires the framing of outsider art by different actors that constitute the field of this kind of art, a qualitative approach to the question is the most adequate one. Qualitative research methods are most fit to understand the social world(s) and most useful to study the results of the outcome of interactions (Bryman, 2012, p. 380). The position of outsider art is a result of social processes and interactions.

Moreover, it is not so much the exact position of outsider art that is questioned; the question goes further as the ongoing (re)positioning of outsider art by curators, museums and gallery directors, studio coordinators and museum visitors is the focus here. In consequence, the method will consist of semi-structured interviews with aforementioned actors. Semi-structured interviews assure a strong base and scheme for the actual interview, but leaves enough room to tackle themes, topics or relevant new information that are brought up by the interviewees (Bryman, 2012, p. 212). This is particularly useful as I believe an openness towards the theme is indispensable.

The data obtained through interviews are enhanced by the use of the vignette method (Barter, 1999). As the vignette method is apt to test beliefs, values, perception and attitudes of respondents (Hughes, 2004, p. 36) it is used in a purely qualitative way in my research. The visuals can serve as an incentive to get the respondents voicing viewing strategies and get an insight in their perception and framing strategies. The reactions to the images cannot be treated as “real” reactions since they are always results of an interaction in an interview setting that is not neutral to begin with (Hughes, 2004, p. 46).

Concretely, seventeen semi-structured interviews are conducted with actors that fulfill several functions within the field of outsider art. Twelve interviews were conducted with twenty one professionals (three interviews included more than one respondent) and five museum visitors were interviewed. Overall, this qualitative approach is most fit to the research question and allows me to get data from a range of different actors in the field and compare the results between them.

### **5.1 Sampling and Data Collection**

The sample of interviewees from the professional sector is selected by a combination of purposive and snowball sampling (Bryman, 2012, p. 416), as the research question already



points out wherefrom the potential respondents can be selected. I focused on all curators from museums of outsider art and asked them if they could refer me to other professionals in the field. An overview of the sample can be found in Appendix A. Professionals from Belgium, the Netherlands and France<sup>8</sup> were approached through purposive sampling in order to get the ball rolling. The selection of actors is mainly based on the availability of the persons (during the research period that spanned from March 2016 to April 2016 included) and another criterion was if they had worked on an outsider art exhibition or project on display.

Geographically, the focus lies on Belgium and the Netherlands, two neighboring countries: although they partly share the same language, they do not share the same cultural space (Hillaert, 2015, p. 4) In comparison, the Netherlands have a cultural policy that is more liberal than the Flemish policy, resulting in institutions that are more oriented towards the market (De Bruijne in Hillaert, 2015, p. 49).

Although practical reasons limit me to these countries, this scope brings in interesting side-effects: historically, the Belgian Brussels and Walloon Region have a strong French orientation, museums I contacted often used the term “art brut” and the institutions include more French artists. Flanders and the Netherlands seem to opt for outsider art, as seen in the name of some of the museums I include in this study, and might use this name to connect with the contemporary art world. In Belgium, most institutions are older than the ones in the Netherlands In fact, the Netherlands seem to experience a revival of interest for outsider art with some prestigious projects but the field seems smaller, while in Belgium museums and art studios have their roots in a movement that leads back to Dubuffet’s collection of art brut. Additionally, the Museum Dr. Guislain plays a remarkable role as it is widely recognized in Flanders, among other reasons thanks to its collaborations with SMAK and the attention from the late popular curator Jan Hoet who has presented much outsider art to the general public.

By including respondents from these different regions, my findings will make it able to see whether there are significant differences between them and if new comparable studies could be fructiferous. Moreover, as the outsider art field is small and respondents mostly know each other, studying two countries and several regions with a different orientation; I hope to be able to enrich my data in the sense that it might lead to findings from the whole outsider art field. I have not found such overarching movements or figures in the Netherlands.

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<sup>8</sup> As France was not part of the geographical focus of this research, French professionals were approached to refer me to other possible respondents from Belgium or the Netherlands.

I limited the selection of respondents to the museums, institutions, galleries and organization that actively take a stance towards outsider art. As important gatekeepers, I identified directors and curators of museums that (have) put outsider art on display in (1) exhibitions or permanent collection of only outsider art, or (2) that combine outsider and non-outsider art in their museum.

Directors and curators of the following museums were contacted: Museum Dr. Guislain (Ghent), MADmusée (Liège), Museum art)&(marges (Brussels) as museums with a focus on outsider art and, in the case of the Museum Dr. Guislain, the history of psychiatry in Belgium. In the Netherlands, I contacted Het Dolhuys (Arnhem), Outsider Art Museum (Amsterdam) and Kunsthal (Rotterdam) that hosts *The Museum of Everything*, an exhibition with works from 19th, 20th and 21st century outsider artists and internationally renowned contemporary artists.

I also approached gallery directors that have exhibited outsider art in the past in both countries in galleries that are mostly parallel galleries as they are all closely connected to art studios or psychiatric facilities: Galerie Atelier Herenplaats (Rotterdam), Kunsthuis Yellow Art (Geel) and Galérie Vertige (Brussels). All of them thus occupy a peculiar position in the field as non-profit organizations that support outsider artists by offering work and exhibition spaces and organize a wide range of activities. The last two are both connected to a mental health institute. In the course of the research, I was referred to the Galerie Hamer (Amsterdam) which, on the other hand, is a purely commercial gallery that has been selling outsider art since the 1970s.

A category of gatekeepers that I discovered thanks to the recommendations of other respondents and reached through them are the coordinators of studios and ateliers where artists (often collectively) work. These studios form an important link between the museums and galleries on the one hand, and the artists on the other hand, as they are the physical location where the artists work and create and get the support they need to create (going from medical support to the actual paint and paper), and sell and donate works to the museums. Often they are located close to or part of mental health institutions. The studios I contacted are the aforementioned Kunsthuis Yellow Art (which is both a studio and a gallery, as it sells the work of the artists) and La Hesse Grand Atelier (Vielsalm).

In addition, I contacted persons that are not linked to museums or galleries such as art consultants, historians and directors of awareness-creating organization including PsycArt asbl (Brussels) and Outsider Art Manifestatie 2016 by Wieg & Mellink Arts Agency

(Amsterdam). They collaborated on exhibitions and projects in museums and they are also mediators and gatekeepers as they often connect outsider art with contemporary art and the society and are thus part of the field of outsider art. I selected them on the basis of exhibitions held in or with museums I had already contacted and as well because they had a track record and were active within the field at the moment of my research.

As a result, I interviewed twenty-one professionals from the art field during twelve interview sessions. Four of them worked for Dutch organizations and the seventeen other respondents were employed in a Belgian organization. One interview was conducted in French, one in Dutch and ten were conducted in English. Overall, the interviews took about one hour, though two interviews with artistic collaborators of an art studio were considerably shorter, about half an hour. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The total amount of interview time is about eleven and a half hours.

I finally interviewed ten out of sixteen respondents I had approached (giving a response rate of 62,5 %). The ones that were excluded because of their location (three), a late response (two) and a cancellation of an interview by the respondent (one). Four respondents brought extra respondents to the interview, leading to the number of eleven respondents that I interviewed without having contacted them myself. Before and during the last interview in Belgium with a museum professional, I felt that I had reached a point of saturation with the interview guide and research question at hand. Yet, when it comes to respondents coming from art studios, galleries and other organizations, I did not reach this point. I think the inclusion of more (commercial) gallery directors could have added new data to the research as the one interview I conducted with a gallery owner stood out among the others.

After “reaching a saturation point” I still interviewed more Dutch respondents because I did not reach this saturation point for Dutch respondents neither: they kept bringing in new information I was not familiar with.

This brings me to the possible bias in my research design: as a Belgian student, I am more familiar with Belgian museums and organizations and were easier to reach for practical reasons. In result, I have more Belgian than Dutch respondents.

Another group of respondents are the museum visitors. These persons were approached in situ. The interviews with these respondents are consistently shorter than the other ones, as the respondents are not prepared in the sense as professionals from the field were and, on the practical level, are not predisposed for a long conversation. The interviews took between five

and nine minutes. Visitors were approached in Museum Dr. Guislain, Outsider Art Museum and Museum art)&(marges. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the respondents and the museums. No personal details were asked. About 66% of the persons I approached were willing to do an interview. People that objected said to have no time, did not speak English or said that they had nothing special to say. As I visited the museums on weekdays, in most museums there were not much visitors in the first place.

In short, the data sources are in the first place field professionals that can be seen as gatekeepers and art viewers that can be influenced by these gatekeepers and take a position towards them. Catalogues and exhibition publications often served as preparatory material for the interviews. As it is the goal to research the framing of outsider art, I chose to focus on well-defined actors that are part of the flux between the social construction of art worlds and the aesthetic evaluation of art, resulting in this sample of professionals I managed to contact.

In order to move beyond a case study between different institutions, I interviewed over ten professionals that do not hold similar positions in their organization. Though this research covers but a very small range of the field, it intends to bring in different views from different actors, thus showing at how many levels the framing of outsider art takes place. Although I did not find a compendium of all outsider museums, studios, galleries and organizations, I suspect there are about five museums of outsider art in both Belgium and the Netherlands. In Belgium, I think there are about twenty art studios and maximum five commercial galleries as many art studios also sell artworks. In the Netherlands I suspect the numbers are even lower, though the galleries are more prominently present than in Belgium.

Finally, by including institutions as museums, galleries and other organizations with different aims, I intend to diversify my data and findings.

## **5.2 Interview Guide, Measures & Focus**

As I opt for a qualitative approach, fixed variables were not set out at the beginning of the research. The theoretical concepts are operationalized in a wide range of questions that were posed during semi-structured interviews and can be found in the interview guide in part 1 and 2 of Appendix B. These served as a template, as every interview guide was tailored to the person interviewed, enabling me to include or skip questions or refer to specific projects.

In order to tackle the use and definition of outsider art, I could ask rather direct questions about how they use the term, how they define and identify it, and how they set

borders, if they do so. To discuss the position of outsider art vis-a-vis other/contemporary art, I tried to bring actual questions referring to actual experiences they had with combining outsider and non-outsider art. Not only the way they defined it, but also if they define it were important measures for my research. The relationship with contemporary art served as a means to see whether we can speak of different art worlds or not.

To study the assumption I made in the theoretical framework about the “move into the mainstream”, I asked question about outsider art, institutions and the art market. I explicitly solicited their views on the growing visibility of outsider art and on how this would evolve. The social versus the aesthetical component of outsider art, that are also part of the theoretical framework, were questioned referring to the background of the artists and the setting of exhibitions or outsider art projects. The need to give medical information or the need to omit it, for example, are measures that point out the views of the respondents in one of both directions.

To operationalize the concept of legitimacy, I brought up questions regarding the difficulty of outsider art to be considered art. Asking how they positioned it as (contemporary) art in their daily practice, lead to the actual discourse they use to grant it legitimacy. Overall, this daily practice was an important part of the discussion because it helped to answer questions related to the trajectory and assumption I made about the differences and similarities of outsider art.

Generally, though I operationalized my concepts as much as possible to come to measures in the interviews, some questions were somewhat theoretical and only over the course of several interviews did I tap in the vein of how professionals spoke about it themselves, again adapting my interview guide a little.

When interviewing the curators, the focus was on their approach to outsider art in their practice. As their role is often that one of *framing* art for the audience, the way they deal with outsider art is highly interesting. When interviewing art dealers or gallery owners, the focus is directed towards the difference in dealing with outsider art in a commercial environment that is situated in a context where outsider art is a niche.

When it comes to art viewers, their reaction and evaluation of outsider art are the main focus and I ask direct questions that inquire their position towards outsider art followed by some questions related to vignettes or visual stimuli. This visual method was only used in the interviews with art viewers and not with professionals because these were expected to be able

to discuss their framing strategies whereas art viewers do not have the examples or vocabulary at hand to do so. This technique, called “graphic elicitation” by Crilly, Blackwell and Clarkson, can help to gather data from interviewees that are inaccessible without the use of graphic or visual stimuli (Crilly, Blackwell & Clarkson, 2006, p. 342). The museum visitors were asked questions regarding how they evaluate the artworks, which ones they expected to see in a regular art museum and which ones they consider art and why. The stimuli were shown all at once to the respondents.

The visual stimuli aimed at getting reactions from the respondents to art that can in a growing degree be qualified as outsider art. Images of six existing artworks are shown on A4-sized sheets. They depict work by Karen Brown (ex-prison inmate), Raymond Morris (outsider artist and spiritualist), Willem Van Genk (Dutch outsider artists), Bart Baele (artist often depicting pain and suffering), Serge Vandercam (part of CoBrA) and Edvard Munch (renowned artist struggling with depression). The three last artists are not regarded as outsiders: one is fairly unknown, one is linked to an art movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and one is a big name of art history. The other artists are outsider artists. The descriptions focus on the formal aspects, positions within art history and the degree of recognition within the art world. All visual stimuli can be found in part 3 of Appendix B.

### **5.3 Analysis**

The data obtained in these semi-structured interviews is analyzed through different phases of coding. These codes and groups of recurring codes are the base of a more profound analysis of the data in relation to the research question and the theoretical framework. An overview of the most important codes can be found in Appendix C.

A first round of structural coding was combined with descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2009, p. 66, 70). Structural codes were applied to data that relates to concepts explicitly studied in the theoretical framework and studied in the research such as “Outsider art vs contemporary art” or “social vs aesthetic dimensions” and were used often in the coding process. These codes were of key importance to come to the subsections of my findings chapter. Descriptive codes were applied after first quick reading of several interviews, when new groups emerged such as “Evolution”, what refers to the respondents discussing how outsider art has evolved or will be evolving in their view.

Afterwards, both in vivo coding (Saldaña, 2009, p. 74) and value coding, which is, opposed to the others, an affective method, were used to find out how respondents frame

outsider art (Saldaña, 2009, p. 87). In vivo enabled me to focus on the actual discourse employed by the respondents while value coding seemed useful in relation to the focus on framing: words as “quality” or “interesting” mostly helped to find new data on the opposition between social and aesthetic dimensions. Value coding helped to interpret the groups of data I had already gathered and grouped according to themes. The attitude, for example, of respondents towards mentioning medical background of artists was easy to interpret thanks to value codes applied to these data.

Focused coding is used to identify the initial themes of interest regarding the research questions and come to major categories in the results (Saldaña, 2009, p. 155). Finally, several similar cycles of coding were repeated to identify as much relevant data as possible.

The findings are organized along some of themes set out in the theoretical framework, but also include parts that entirely emerged through the study of the data.

## 4 RESULTS

### 4.1 Overview

In this chapter the results of the empirical research are presented and discussed. The findings that emerged from the interviews with professionals and museum visitors are grouped in thematic subchapters and are analyzed in the light of the research question. The selection of data was done on the basis of recurring themes and significant observations in the various interviews. The results presented below are thus a selection of a myriad of angles to take on the framing of outsider art. As a result, this will lead to a conclusion that is not an endpoint but rather a signpost in the debate on outsider art.

Remarkably, many respondents presented different opinions and views on outsider art during the same interview sessions. Often they were conscious of this and referred to the duality of their answers themselves, but on other occasions they would frame outsider art in a different way depending on the topic of discussion.

This chapter starts with a more general discussion: (1) the framing, use and legitimization of outsider art as a term by the respondents. Next is a part on (2) the social versus aesthetic values in the framing of outsider art. It focuses on how the respondents deal with this opposition and how the appreciation of outsider art for its social dimension is, generally, seen as an obstruction for outsider art to be recognized as art. Following the theme of legitimacy, I look at (3) the relationship between outsider art and contemporary art, dividing the framing strategies in three subsections: inclusion, integration and opposition. Finally, (4) the appropriation of the “brand” outsider art is discussed. The second and third subchapter provide the most in-depth discussions as they are based on interesting, often contrasting visions.

This division of major themes is guided by the research question, namely how gatekeepers frame outsider art, and the middle chapters provide the best answer to this question. When it comes to subquestions on the differences between the respondent groups and the way the respondents deal with the paradox of outsider art, I preferred to present these result in every chapter, rather than making a subsection for it. The sections also contain several findings that surged from the data itself, which explains why both structural and thematic coding were used in the data analysis.

These discussions lead to a concluding chapter that considers the range of the findings, relates it back to the theory and research question and presents further research possibilities.



## **4.2 The Definition of Outsider Art**

A logical starting point is the question how the respondents define outsider art, if they define it at all, because all professional respondents who work in this field have to relate their activities to a certain point to the name and deal with the implications of that.

### **4.2.1 The Duality of the Term**

Overall, the respondents expressed an awareness of the duality of the term outsider art. When asked directly, the majority of them did not give explicit definitions or strict criteria by which they define it. Independent of whether the term was used by the institutions they worked for, many initial reactions spoke of an ambivalent, difficult term, a term that could easily be misused or is subject of discussion, what made them wary of giving a clear-cut definition.

When defining outsider art, many respondents do not recur to formal or substantial criteria inherent to the art but bring in many aspects going from the social position of the artist, the relationship with the art world, to the reception of the works within this art world. A curator of an outsider art museum stated outsider art has no strict limits, as it is all:

“Art made by people who are not part of the official professional circuit. That can be psychiatric patients or people with a mental deficiency. Or people who live in isolated places or people who don’t find their position as easily in society as we do. Or just people who just do what they want to without really caring what the art society says and do their own thing. It’s very broad” (interview 1, curator).

This is an inclusive approach to the meaning outsider art on a variety of levels.

The director of a museum of outsider art placed the definition of outsider art resolutely in the eye of the beholder: for him it cannot be defined based on its features:

“It’s neither [social nor aesthetic]. It’s the reception of the works. How it is perceived by the professionals and by the art world. [...] And it could be that they’re socially excluded, sure. [...] But you cannot say that because one is socially different, he is an outsider artists” (interview 2, museum director)

In this way, he places the mere existence of the category within what an art world accepts at a given moment in time, independent of social or artistic criteria, such as the mental condition of the artist.

A similar, non-essential view on outsider art was expressed by another museum director, who linked this idea of reception to how the official art discourse always selects what art is and has always rejected what doesn't fit the picture: “[w]hen Michelangelo was painting the Sistine Chapel there were a lot of people doing incredible things around the world. We just don't know it and it's lost because it's not part of the storytelling of what art is” (interview 3, museum director). He later brings in Vermeer, saying he was a long time not accepted in the history of art, drawing parallels to outsiders that are not (yet) accepted in art history today, but might be one day.

Opposed to this we find the reaction of a commercial gallery director who did not share this view. For him, outsider art should refer to the art itself instead of the maker: “[f]or me the definition of outsider art is stylistic and based on the content distance from the mainstream” (interview 6, gallery director), he explained. Though he accepts that there is a grey zone between outsider art and mainstream art, he said he could recognize outsider art “from a distance”. In addition, he expressed that outsider art also has certain formal characteristics: outsider artists are inclined to use certain materials and make works of a “man made size”. For this reason, he does not see works made in art studios as outsider art, because the artists are encouraged to change their work to get a higher impact: “[i]t's a miracle that sometimes an artist emerges in these groups. If they do, great, fantastic”, he said, “but do not call all these productions outsider art”.

As he is the only respondent with (as he noted himself) direct commercial interests in outsider art, he advocates strict borders and parameters of what is and is not outsider art during the interview in his gallery that could not be discerned from a contemporary art gallery. In result, his gallery cannot be qualified as a parallel gallery that prefers creating awareness over commercial goals. This position towards the strict use and definition of genre, fits Mauws' (2000, p. 403) view, who saw genre as a framing device to streamline the flow towards consumption of cultural products. Indeed, while the other respondents, expressed ambiguity and ambivalence, his position could be a commercial one because he is a gallery director operating in a niche sector. He needs to be able to clearly identify outsider art to be able to sell it.

### 4.2.2 Indirect Definitions

In spite of the explicit framing of outsider art as a dual term that is not easy to use, implicitly, the respondents used it on other occasions. When describing the appeal of outsider art for them personally, the respondents spoke about in a classical way: as a pure, authentic and intuitive form of art (interviews 1, museum director; 3, museum director; 4, curator; 5, museum advisor; 9, studio coordinator; 11, studio coordinator; 12, art consultant). The coordinator of an art studio referred to the “simplicity and directness and the radical things [the artists] can do with their works” (interview 10, studio coordinator) while his colleague found freedom in the works (interview 11, studio coordinator).

One of the respondents who works as a curator in an outsider art museum voiced a recurring idea when saying that “outsider art is art that you can feel more than think about. And that is for me the appeal. I also love conceptual art but for me this is something pure”, and laughing she added: “Yeah I’m really talking very traditional art brut” (interview 4, curator), what showed shows there is a difference in the way she feels about it with how she treats it in her practice.

Furthermore, we see this difference between implicit and explicit framing in the use of the term by a studio coordinator who dismisses the relevance of the term in his daily practice but did, later, describe two groups of artists in the studio: the ones who develop a conceptual discourse around their work and others that have their own way of working and techniques and seemingly live in their own world, the “outsiders” (interview 11, studio coordinator). In similar vein someone referred to the recognizable “outsider style” of some of the studio’s artists (interview 10, studio coordinator).

This confirms De Cleene & Van Goidshoven’s (2013, p. 21) idea that outsider art as a raw and authentic genre is a persistent and popular contemporary myth. Moreover, it partially confirms Ardery’s (1997, p. 344) findings that curators and critics framed folk art as authentic art in the United States. This confirms my expectations based on theirs and Jones et al.’s (2010, p. 54) conclusion that the idea of raw and authentic outsider art is firmly rooted.

On another level, all the museum directors or curators that spoke about how they select the artworks to be acquired by the museum (they work in outsider art museums), said that the existing coherence of the collection dictates which works fit in or not, and that they do not consider the presence of outsider traits in the work. Yet, one of the respondents explained that neither a contemporary masterpiece nor a classic art brut painting by Adolf Wölfli could ever end up in their collection (interview 3, museum director), what shows he operates within strict

border and for him outsider art has a well-defined place. For collection acquisitions, decisions are made in consideration with colleagues and the term might be clear enough to be left unspoken. One curator explains: “I don’t think we use the sentence ‘This is not interesting because it’s not outsider art’, [...] we work intuitive. Do we have a good feeling of that work? Do we see connections with the collection?” (interview 4, curator). This shows the use of the term depends on the context, as these professionals do not need to use it explicitly to know what characteristics they are talking about (for example with regards to their collection).

### **4.2.3 The Use of the Term**

This being said, these observations lead us to an analysis of why and how the respondents hesitate to use and define outsider art while they do accept it is part of their daily practice.

Most of the respondent’s caution for the use of the term stems from a fear that the term excludes, separates or stigmatizes the artists they work with. Several comments are similar to this one from a museum director with over thirty years of experience in the field: “on the pragmatic level we say it’s important to use this term. But fundamentally it’s very difficult to use that term [...]. Fundamentally, I don’t want to differentiate it anymore and I even think it’s stigmatizing to use it” (interview 5, museum advisor). This idea is echoed in the interviews with other professionals who aim at integrating outsider art further into the art world.

Seemingly elaborating on this pragmatic view, the director of an outsider art museum frames the use of the word outsider as a reappropriation: he takes a sense of pride in using this term that, for him, symbolizes being “banned”, not being accepted yet by the mainstream (interview 2, museum director).

Compared to museum professionals, the respondents from art studios, expressed much less enthusiasm to use the term because it separates them even more from the regular art circuit. Indeed, all art studio collaborators wanted to integrate their artists into the regular exhibition and market circuit (interviews 8, studio director; 9, studio coordinator; 10, studio coordinator; 11, studio coordinator).

When it comes to the museums visitors, most respondents did not know outsider art (interviews 13, 14, 16, 17) and had no specific stance towards the use of the term. Yet, one respondent an art history student, said to be reluctant to use the term, also saying it could be stigmatizing and shift the focus away from the art (interview 15, museum visitor).

Yet, several respondents are aware of how they can frame and employ the term outsider art in their favor. As different art worlds respond to their own codes, a studio director explained:

“For me it’s not so important how to call it as long as it is art. But it can be important to use this kinds of word to be recognized in some fields. [...]. It depends where you want to promote the artists. Maybe it’s important to use art brut in this case and maybe outsider art in another case” (interview 9, studio director).

Indeed, one museum director (interview 1) and two art studio directors (interview 9, studio directors, the other one told it after the recording) told that in applications for grants or subsidies, they used the term to strategically focus on the social dimensions of outsider art, whereas in their daily practice this is what they most vividly avoid. So as politicians, “just love this idea of art and handicapped and so on and want to give money for that”, one of them explained, this puts them in a difficult position. “it’s quite schizophrenic because we need the money to do our work” (interview 1, museum director), which relates to the case of the commercial gallery directors, though for him this position does not seem difficult.

Concluding, not only do we see different ways of defining (strict or broad) and using outsider art within the field, almost all respondents frame it differently according to the situation and their aims. When striving for recognition in the mainstream, they will avoid the name altogether (and advocate to stop use the word), while within the workings of the institution or the outsider art world the term can be used much more freely, though often implicitly. The term is employed strategically and framed in different ways, with the exception of the commercial gallery owner whose strategic use of the term is straightforward.

### **4.3 Social Values versus Aesthetic Values**

The opposition between social values and aesthetic or artistic values was a prevalent topic of discussion. As said, some respondents did not use the term outsider art actively because it entails social exclusion they wish to avoid. Yet, the efforts to frame outsider art away from the “social atmosphere” are so significant that it will be discussed separately.

#### **4.3.1 Overthrowing expectations**

Contrary to my expectations that were based on the theoretical research in the first chapter, the respondents did not frame outsider art as a hybrid artform where social and artistic goals

meet. Since over half of the professional respondents worked in art studios with fragile persons or in a museum with a link to psychiatry, I expected that they would use outsider art as a means to create awareness and help the acceptance of mental health issues in society.

Yet, the findings point in the opposite direction: whether they worked in an art studio, museum or elsewhere, the respondents did not refer to social values to enhance the appreciation of outsider art. Quite the contrary: they steered away from the social side for different reasons.

Before discussing further, I mention the only exception. For a former outsider art museum director, and currently advisor, the world of psychiatry and art can easily collide without weakening each other. For him art, social exclusion and psychiatry are all part of a discussion on normality the museum has to address. Where others shy away of these connections, he actively looks for them:

“This summer we are making an exhibition with Dirk De Wachter, a well known Flemish psychiatrist. I think it’s important that we show how important art is for a psychiatrist. [...] [F]or us it’s a gift when he’s saying a good novel is for [him] as a psychiatrist more inspiring than the Annual of the American Journal of Psychiatry” (interview 5, museum advisor).

Opposed to other respondents, he seemed as much driven by social issues than by artistic ones. His interests do not lie solely in the art world and I suppose that this lack of pressure to be taken serious as a museum (the museum is successful and has a good reputation) enabled him to take this position (though it can be the other way around as well).

Additionally, the visitors I interviewed neither seemed to make the distinction: one expressed his approval of having a museum in a mental health institution (interview 14, museum visitor), and other visitors who visited an exhibition in a mixed environment did not oppose this to the artistic qualities of the works (interviews 13, 15, 17, all museum visitors).

#### **4.3.2 Commercial Purposes**

A very clear reason for the framing of outsider art as an artform that needs to get rid of social connotations came from the respondents with commercial interests in the artistic production, which are the gallery and art studio directors who also sell the artworks. One explained that telling that the artist is a mental patient influenced on the valorization of the work:

“We sell work at the same price as other artists and we notice people don’t want to pay as much for a work of a psychiatric patient. It’s regarded as work with a minor artistic value as well as from an economical point of view” (interview 8, studio director).

He recalls a discussion with a potential client: “and when we said the price, he said ‘Oh no that’s too much. [...]. Because it is a work of a psychiatric patient then I don’t give it. I don’t pay it’”. In result, he now avoids descriptions of the social background of the studio artists.

The art market, naturally, is a concern as well for the commercial gallery director. He too observed that “although outsider art seems to be very fashionable at the moment, as far as prices are concerned it’s a very very moderate position in the art market” (interview 6, gallery director). He cites the example of George Widener, an artist with Asperger syndrome he represented until the artist wanted to get rid of the outsider stigma and pursued a career in the contemporary art circuit. The prices of his work subsequently rose beyond what would have been possible if he had stayed with the outsider art gallery.

For the professional respondents who spoke about it, the art market had rather positive effects. Though, one of them noted that once the art market accepts an outsider artist, the works gets out of reach for them (interview 4, curator), another one saw the inclusion of outsider art in the market as a sign of appreciation for the work because “when the market is getting stronger or is evolving a lot of other aspects of the work of people working with this kind of art is evolving too in a more professional way” (interview 3, museum director). The market could thus help getting rid of the “stigma” surrounding the works, as it highlights the aesthetic sides at the expense of the social conditions. In similar vein, for outsider artists, selling artworks serves as the proof of being a real artist, as a studio director explained:

“I’ve a man working here and two years ago for the first time in his life he sold one of his works. And then he said to me ‘Now I’m a real artist’. This man is creating art for years. He was in exhibitions and so on but for the first time he sold one of his works and in his vision you are an artist when you sell” (interview 8, studio director).

In conclusion, we see very strong framing of outsider art as artistically valuable by gatekeepers to get the outsiders artists accepted by the art market and consequently, the acceptance by the art market is seen as a legitimizing factor by several actors from the field.

### 4.3.3 Striving for Artistic Recognition

We just saw that the valuation of outsider art based on criteria linked to social elements are detrimental to the artistic appreciation of the work for the majority of the respondents. This already starts with the fact that, as one of the respondents indicated to me, all respondents speak consistently about artists instead of patients when speaking about, for example, the members of an art studio (interview 6, gallery director). Or as another director said: [w]e are an art studio. Not a therapeutic environment. It's a setting where artists with a psychiatric background can work on art" (interview 8, studio director).

That art made in their studios or presented in exhibitions they had curated could be considered as therapeutic pastime instead of autonomous artistic creation, provoked strong reactions in the respondents. One art studio director told about one of the artists with Down syndrome that was invited to an international comics festival the week before the interview took place:

"At this very famous festival nobody looked at him like he is a handicapped guy. Nobody. They welcomed him like another famous cartoonist. He was close to Brecht Evens<sup>9</sup> and it was normal for everybody to see him because his project is so good. [...] It's really important to be recognized as an artist" (interview 9, studio director).

She told that it goes to the point that they refuse to partake in projects that focus on the handicap of the artists and not on the art: "we don't want them to say 'Oh they're handicapped'. We just want to say 'They are artists'" (interview 9, studio director).

Most respondents opine that as long as the focus is on what one creates in spite of his/her mental health condition, social position or outsidership, they are not taken seriously as artists. As long as this is the case, a museum director found that then "they will always encounter the glass roof. There is a limit for acceptance if they continue like this" (interview 3, museum director). This was almost literally echoed in the words one of the art consultants who recently decided to establish a platform for outsider art in Holland because it had to quit the atmosphere of "medical care and psychiatric art" (interview 12, art consultant).

A concrete example here is the question to which extent curators and museum directors give (medical) background to the works of outsider artists in exhibitions or catalogues. To no surprise, the overall tendency is to avoid a social or health conditions. A

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<sup>9</sup> A Belgian illustrator whose work has received critical acclaim and has won various international prizes.



director and curator who often combines outsider art with contemporary artworks says she does not give biographical data as she hopes visitors will have “an aesthetic shock” without knowing anything about the artist (interview 1, museum director). If people ask, she says, she won’t point out which are the outsider artists with mental health problems and which are contemporary artists. A studio director shares her view:

“When we publish catalogues, we don’t give background of a patient or artist. It’s not important that he or she is psychotic. That’s not important for us. Maybe the people are interested in the background but we don’t work with this background. We work with artworks” (interview 8, studio director).

In other interviews, respondents expressed slightly different views, saying that not giving background is always very difficult. A studio coordinator said that some “sensational” buyers want to know all about the background of the artists while others only look at the art to decide. He didn’t oppose to any of the views, but if we aim to “close the gap, we should really let go of the story behind it”, he stressed (interview 10, studio coordinator).

A peculiar case was the interview with the eight members of the Managing Committee of a contemporary art gallery at the site of a psychiatric hospital<sup>10</sup> that is run by a team of patients and professional coordinators. Despite this and the gallery’s location; they did choose not to work specifically with outsider artists, but wanted to create a professional workspace where the fragile background was not part of the frame (interview 7, patient).

#### **4.3.4 The Quality label**

All of the professional respondents are to a high degree gatekeepers whose daily practice often entail the selection of artworks for exhibitions, collections or catalogues, but also the selection of artists for their art studio or projects. The most recurring word they used to justify or shed light on how they select was definitely “the quality”.

A curator from a museum that shows outsider art and has a permanent exhibition on the history of psychiatry explained that “the quality of the work is the most important thing” when she looks at potential outsider art acquisitions, yet it has happened that something made by a psychiatric patient triggered her interest but couldn’t convince her (interview 4, curator).

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<sup>10</sup> Apart from this relevant position vis-a-vis outsider art, further data from this interview is not used in this analysis because their relation with outsider art does not go further than this. When “all of the respondents” or “a vast part of the respondents” are mentioned in this chapter, this does not include these eight respondents.

She said that “when the artistic value [of the artwork] is not important it’s always more related to the history of psychiatry”. This shows the high qualitative artistic standard she sets for outsider art, as opposed to the informative part of the museum where artworks with less aesthetic value can be presented. For the different parts of the museum, she uses a different strategy of dealing with outsidership, what exposes showing the division between artistic and social values in practice.

The art studio director who went to a festival with the project of an artist with Down syndrome voiced a similar view (interview 9, studio director). She wanted to show the project because of its high quality. In that kind of festival she only wants to show the best and if it wouldn’t have been good enough, they wouldn’t have gone.

For her the focus on quality shows respect for the artists and what they do. One of them explains that when they work with external curators, however, she has to insist to take on this approach as well: “We explain them that when you select you don’t judge the people but the production. We explain them it’s a kind of respect. Because in real life it’s the same. To show everything would be charity” (interview 9, studio director).

The professionals who are trying to achieve recognition for the outsider art frame artistic and social values with caution, but they have to deal with other parties as well (such as political funders, sponsors or social partners) for whom this strict division between the social and artistic dimension is not always relevant, as seen before. A museum director explained that during his first experience as a curator of outsider art within the program of the European Capital of Culture, a conflict arose:

“The welfare department of the city<sup>11</sup> wanted that the centers for the disabled and people with learning disabilities were also included in the program. It was a quite difficult discussion as their main aim was to be represented. Our main aim was to have the quality that we expected in the program of a Cultural Capital” (interview 3, museum director).

His artistic goals were not reconcilable with their social mission what eventually led to the centers being taken out of the program and media outrage.

So we can observe clear framing of these respondents of outsider art as art of a very high quality (that is why they select it). Yet, interestingly, two respondents, an arts consultant

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<sup>11</sup> The respondent referred to the OCMW – The Public Centre for Social Welfare, a Belgian institution that provides social assistance on the municipal level.

and a gallery director did explicitly state that in outsider art there is as much good as bad art as elsewhere (interviews 6, gallery director; 12, art consultant). When asked what the appeal was to her, the consultant answered she wouldn't say she liked outsider art that much.

Here we see how framing can make use of preceding ideological concepts (Baumann, 2007, p. 59). The gallery director and the consultant explicitly use the idea of good versus bad art to frame outsider art. Saying there is bad outsider art as well strengthens the case of outsider art as a full-blown and nuanced form of art as it shows they use the strict selective taste for outsider art they have for other art.

#### **4.3.5 Societal Influences on Outsider Art**

This, however, seemingly contrasts with something that over half of the respondents referred to as an important factor in the growing appreciation of outsider art within the mainstream. Regarding this discussion, the respondents did not avoid social factors.

In the first place, the diminishing stigmatization of mental health issues and the growing openness to talk about them leads to the acceptance of art from people who are different, a curator said (interview 4, curator). Additionally, one respondent linked the strength of the welfare state to the outsider art integration in the art field (interview 9, studio coordinator). The framing of outsider art in a wider societal picture by these respondents does confirm my expectation regarding the "opportunity space" (acceptance of social difference) that needs to be available before it becomes accepted (Baumann, 2007, p. 53).

Yet for the commercial gallery director with strict views on outsider art, positive societal changes can have contrary effects. The success of art studios, he said, can influence and "suffocate" the work of outsider artists: "From a social, human point of view it's all great. But purely from an artistic point of view it sheds a different light" (interview 6, gallery director). For him, from an artistic point of view potentially great art might be lost because of medication and social programs, which relates to Ross' (2015, p. 89) findings that social awareness can negatively impact the perception of artistic quality.

Concluding, most striking is the framing of outsider art as high quality art that should be judged solely on its aesthetic merits, and not on the social dimensions of the artists or the frame in which the art was made or shown. This way, respondents aim for recognition and legitimization of outsider art as a proper art form. Consequently, in the next subchapter I look

at how the respondents position this proper art form within the contemporary art field. Do they compare? Do they want integration or separation? And how do they pursue this?

#### **4.4 Outsider Art and the Contemporary Art Field**

The most interesting relationship that emerged from the research was the one between outsider art and the contemporary art field. The move into this art field from outsider art incited this research and, as expected, the topic was very present during the interviews sessions. I focus on three meaningful frames I encountered: (1) outsider art as contemporary art, (2) outsider art becoming integrated in the contemporary art field, and (3) outsider art opposed to contemporary art. Here, again, I observed tensions between the answers given by the respondents as many of them applied all three different frames on different occasions.

##### **4.4.1 Outsider Art as Contemporary Art**

The first and foremost framing by the most of the respondents is that outsider art should be considered contemporary art. Several respondents clearly admitted that one the clear goals of their organization is to include outsider art in the contemporary art field (interviews 2 museum director; 3, museum director; 4, curator; 8, studio director; 9, studio director; 12 art consultant).

The first approach was to shift the focus to contemporary art as an overarching genre that includes all other artforms. A studio coordinator pointed out the openness of the contemporary art world today. Just as street art or comics can be contemporary art, outsider art can be part of the same field as “contemporary art is the art that is made today” (interview 9, studio coordinator). One of the art consultants shared this idea of border-crossing: “It’s all part of contemporary art. You cannot say there’s contemporary art and outsider art. It’s under the word contemporary art” (interview 12, art consultant). Here, rather than looking at outsider art, the respondents frame the movement into the mainstream within the changes of the broader art field, in a way similar to an observation Paul Lopes made on the acceptance of jazz music in the broader field of music, framing the acceptance in changing mores of this field (Lopes, 2004, p. 276)

Yet, more striking are the cases where the respondent look at it from the side of outsider art but adopt the codes of contemporary art to do this. Both the director of an important outsider art museum in the Netherlands (interview 2, museum director) and an art gallery director (interview 6, gallery director) present outsider art in the same way as contemporary

art (using the white cube combined with a sober, formalistic approach to the artworks), giving the message that both can be dealt with in the same way – what boils down to the assimilation to the codes of the contemporary art world that decide what is art. For a curator, the alternative way did indeed imply that it is not contemporary art: she called the presentation of for example *The Museum of Everything* in Kunsthall “interesting” but a “very full”, “chaotic” and “dark” style that doesn’t show it as contemporary art (interview 4, curator).

This curator focused on the responsibility curators have: “We also create a little bit the work in the way we show it – also in the scenography. You have to take care to show it like contemporary art” (interview 4, curator). For another curator and director, treating his outsider art museum collection as contemporary art meant publishing monographic catalogues and texts just like contemporary museums do – which is an adoption of structural codes of this art world (interview 3, museum director). This way, he wanted other curators to consider it as contemporary art and select it for contemporary art exhibitions. *Au fond*, he placed working with contemporary artists and outsider artists on the same level: “The approach is the same because the work is always different. If I go see two contemporary artists and then an outsider artist– what I have to do is the same” (interview 3, museum director), which shows for him what had to be done was only adopt codes to be treated equal.

Another approach from several respondents consisted in getting outsider art into recognized art institutions. A studio director said “the main goal is to break the boundaries between what is happening here in our studio in this outsider environment and what is happening in the regular art scene” (interview 8, studio director). For the museum director mentioned just before, the main aim is to bring their artists to modern art museums:

“I would be happy if Pascal Tassini has a solo show in SMAK. That would be great. And it happens. In American studios there are some artists that are in the MoMA but the mechanism to for an artist to be in private collections, in public collections, and then to have a solo show etcetera - it’s a long way” (interview 3, museum director).

He later points out that in essence, the trajectory the work of Pascal Tassini has to follow does not differ from Rinus Van De Velde’s<sup>12</sup> work, a process of “pulling the right strings”, independent of being outsider art or not (interview 3, museum director).

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<sup>12</sup> A young Belgian artists whose works are very popular at the time of writing this thesis and whose first solo exhibition was held in the SMAK in 2016.

Both art consultants shared this view. When they started their platform, they directly contacted the big names such as Stedelijk Museum, FOAM, Kunsthal and “top commercial galleries”. Essentially, for them outsider art should be in the same places where contemporary art is and where the broad public goes because it is the same, “So”, one of them explained, “outsider art needs more marketing. That’s the whole thing” (interview 12, art consultant).

A classical example of framing was found in the similarities respondents drew between outsider artists and established modern or contemporary artists in order to erase the differences between both: one art consultant said French artists Jean-Michel Basquiat drew inspiration from the work of outsider artist Sam Doyle. She also referred to the relationship between Pablo Picasso and the outsider Rousseau: “Rousseau said to Picasso ‘Who is making modern art? You or me? It’s me who is making more modern art than you are doing’. And Picasso understood that” (interview 12, art consultant). This way, she tries to place both artists, from seemingly different art worlds, on the same level.

In short, this first framing strategy of outsider art as being (equal to) contemporary art can be summed up in the view of a contemporary artist who works as a studio coordinator:

“I think there are people in the regular art circuit that could fit within these walls as well and what I see within these wall could be happening outside the context of outsider art. So it’s hard to find coherence in this. For me, it is all quite mixed up” (Ik denk dat er in het reguliere kunstcircuit types zitten die evengoed hier binnen de muren een plaats hebben en hier evengoed mensen die buiten de context van outsiderkunst kunnen functioneren. Dus het is moeilijk om daar een lijn op te trekken. Voor mij loopt het allemaal toch door elkaar) (interview 11, studio coordinator).

What the respondents stress is on the one hand that today contemporary art is such a broad concept that outsider art fits into it, and on the other hand, they present outsider art as an autonomous artform with the same (i.e. formalistic) markers as contemporary art and apply their codes to outsider art. Remarkable is the reference to the typical trajectory outsider art has to go that confirms Heinich (2012, p. 5) theory on how art receives autonomy. I asked the question whether outsider art had a “genre”-specific trajectory and these findings seem to show that in fact it has to go by the same line as contemporary art, being picked up by the right gallery, the right collector, the right curator, to receive, step by step, artistic legitimacy.

#### 4.4.2 Outsider Art as part of the Contemporary Art

A slightly different approach is what one of the curators called “integration” instead of “inclusion or assimilation” (interview 4, curator). More than a play of words, this refers to cases in which respondents do not frame outsider art on the level of contemporary art, but create a framework in which it keeps its specificities while being part of the contemporary art world. In the discussed cases, we find clear answers to how respondents deal with the difficulty of being part of the mainstream, while needing to be an outsider to be recognized by this mainstream; the one-foot-in, one-foot-out position. Yet, again, this position does not exclude that the same respondents frame outsider art differently at other moments.

Examples are projects in which outsider artists and contemporary artists work together or where external curators came in the outsider art field. All respondents from the art studios and most from the museums supported these mixed projects (interviews 3, museum director; 4, curator; 8 studio director; 9, studio director; 10, studio coordinator; 12, studio coordinator). A studio director explained that they started very small ten years ago, in an attempt to build a bridge to contemporary art: “We invited established artists to do projects with artists with a psychiatric background and it grow and grow. [...] You see that both parties benefit from these projects. The [studio] artists and the regular artists. They influence each other” (interview 8, studio director). That outsider art and contemporary art can have a dialogue or a meeting on the same level is a key element of this view.

Another studio director calls this “the third language” (la troisième language) of the mixed<sup>13</sup> projects they organize. For both respondents, this language or approach allows them to be part of both worlds whereas a singular approach would not do justice to outsider art. Referring to the moment when the Collection of Art Brut wanted to acquire work made in their studio, the director said: “It’s dangerous to be in this collection because it’s closed. My aim is to open everything for the artists and not let them closed in one category” (interview 9, studio director). Opposed to this, she placed their third path:

“When you work with contemporary artists and with mixity it’s incredible because they convince the curators, they have the network and they are the best ambassadors. [...] So it’s good to work with contemporary artists because then we reach everything within the contemporary field” (interview 9, studio director).

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<sup>13</sup> Called *Mixité* in the interview.

Here, she doesn't advocate similarity but looks for a new space where outsider art can fit within contemporary art. Another respondent saw these mix of different worlds also as essential to their museum. She described her museum as a place to "open the view" and "dialogue": "It's interesting to question contemporary art with outsider art and to question outsider art with contemporary art", she explained (interview 1, museum director).

We see how outsider art professionals use practical and symbolic tools (Baumann, 2007, p. 55) from another art world to get legitimacy: respondents referred to, on the one hand, practical tools such as the expertise of contemporary artists, their network and exhibition spaces. On the other hand, collaborations give symbolic value to outsider artists without giving up their difference. In result, they become legitimate within a new art world.

This position brings us to the very heart of this research. Respondents who frame outsider art in this in-between position deliberately choose not to answer if and how outsider art is different from other forms of art. Two clear examples: first, one of the art studios organized an exhibition where they confronted works of an outsider artist with those of a contemporary artists without telling who made what. The curator explains: "One of the couples actually copied each other's work as a starting point of their dialogue and I thought that was a really good way to dissolve the prejudice. I really believe in that" (interview 10, studio coordinator).

Indeed, the dialogue started from an initial difference between the artists, but the final dialogue served as a mirror between both worlds. Second, the director of an outsider art museum questioned the role of his recently opened museum: "The question is if outsider art being shown in a place like this is still outsider art or not. [...] I don't provide an answer in the exhibition" (interview 2, museum director). Although he said this framing puzzled many critics, the museum is the answer: "We just turn up the questions. That's for me a deliberate position".

#### **4.4.3 Outsider Art opposed to Contemporary Art**

A contradictory finding is that for as much as most respondents strived for an integration or assimilation, this didn't stop them from placing outsider and contemporary art diametrically opposite to each other on other occasions, for example when asked what the appeal of outsider art is for them.

When respondents did this, they did this to frame outsider art as more honest, pure or direct than the contemporary art world. One respondent drew a comprehensive picture:



“I think the public and part of the art world is a bit tired of Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons and yet another balloon dog. I personally can enjoy it. Fun as well. But it’s no more connected to the things that people are preoccupied for in their daily lives. It’s a discourse which has its own rules, its own language, its own world. [...] So then in the Biennale in Venice you have this palace with outsider art which is direct, which is figurative, that you can relate to - that touches a snare with the art world, the art critics and with the public” (interview 2, museum director).

Rather than similarity, this respondent sees a difference in the experience of outsider art. Another respondent who used to work as a curator at SMAK said laughing that he didn’t miss the openings and art fairs he attended back then. Opposed to that atmosphere of “whipped cream and a lot of air”, in the outsider art world he finds direct contact and a down-to-earth attitude that contemporary artists he works with also appreciate: “I think the contemporary art world has to think about that: how to create an environment that is adapted to the artist and not only to the business” (interview 3, museum director).

The notion of otherness, in relation to contemporary art, was raised by a curator that affirmed outsider art forces us “to look at it with different glasses”, thus stating that it imposes another disposition on the viewer or the person dealing with it (interview 4, curator). This relates to Simmel’s concept of the artist as a sociological other, as another respondent connected this to how seemingly artistic actions can be interpreted aesthetically while at the same time have a non-artistic meaning as in the case of a creation by an outsider artist:

“It looks like it’s made to be on a plinth and to be looked at as sculpture. But in fact it’s an object that is the result of a very direct movement of a psychiatric patient in his room in Italy that takes wires from the wall and uses them protect his teddy bear. [...] It’s very close to an artistic statement. It’s a position that is artistic but it’s different” (interview 3, museum director).

As an Other, this artist brings in something from outside into the art world, while not being judged on exactly the same standards as other artists.

These characterizations are related to the framing of outsider art as authentic, pure and intuitive that has been described earlier in the first part of this chapter. Yet, here, next to the formal and aesthetic dimension, the different social atmosphere of both worlds is emphasized.

The only one who stressed the difference on all levels was the commercial gallery director: “The appreciation of outsider art seems more based on the similarities with mainstream art than with the difference. I like outsider art because of the difference. Vive la différence!” (interview 6, gallery director).

When it comes to visitors, it is difficult to present far-reaching findings. The visitor of a museum that shows only outsider art said the art could be presented in contemporary art museums as well, (interviews 16 & 17, museum visitors) while visitors of mixed exhibitions did not differentiate between something they would consider outsider art and something else (interviews 13, 14 & 15, museum visitors). Yet, on a basic level, one of them placed the outsider art she had seen on the level of contemporary art: “There were some things that made me wonder if was art, but that’s just like in contemporary art” (Puis il y a des choses effectivement où on peut s’interroger sur le fait que c’est de l’art, c’est comme ben dans l’art contemporain des fois) (interview 17, museum visitor).

This being said, all visitors’ reactions can be interpreted in the frame of the aesthetic disposition, in the sense that they accepted what they saw as art because it is in a museum environment, and they did not look at it with different “outsider” glasses.

Overall, when looking at the differences between Belgium and the Netherlands, the Dutch respondents mostly advocated the first discussed approach: all of them stressed that outsider art is contemporary art. This shows that outsider art, from being lesser known in the Netherlands, is being brought and framed in the established contemporary art field and institutions by the respondents I have interviewed. The mixity projects and the approach that aims at integration within the contemporary art field, on the other hand, seem to be more present in Belgium. Moreover, these projects and the dialogue between contemporary art and outsider art have been present in the workings of the institutions they work for for a long time.

#### **5.4 The Appropriation of the Brand Outsider Art**

This final part of the findings deals with a question raised in the theoretical chapter that I couldn’t resolve. Scholars such as MacLagan (MacLagan, 2009, p. 17) suggests that outsider art might have become a label now that it is moving into the mainstream, and I look at what respondents saw as the implications of this.

If a label is a strict and clear-cut categorization, a label that all respondents use in a consistent way is that of art brut. When they refer to the term that was coined by Jean

Dubuffet, several respondents use words as “canon”, the “classics” or “established artists” to refer to the works of Adolf Wölfli or Henry Darger, showing this has become a historical genre with well-defined borders, that does influence outsider art, but cannot be seen as the same (interviews 2, museum director; 3, museum director; 4, curator; 8, studio director).

For outsider art, however, there is no consensus among respondents over a strict categorization or if the name is abused. One respondent, neutrally commented on the growing interest for outsider art and how some people “joined the bandwagon” (springt op de kar) by naming new museums and projects outsider (interview 4, curator). Another professional, too, saw this happening but said to be very skeptical about the “branding” of outsider art as it focuses only on the spectacular: “It’s a brand that can be used for anything”, he said, “sometimes I get mails from people saying ‘Oh I’m an outsider artist, can you have a look at this?’ And I see work and I don’t even know what it is” (interview 3, museum director). Another curator did mention the abuse of the label:

“There are a lot of artists who are not being in contemporary arts and a lot of them are coming to us and say they are an outsider. And it’s very clear they are not. I don’t want to say it but they are just bad artists” (interview 4, curator).

Finally, this shows outsider art can be used and abused as a brand, or a step-up by non-outsider artists to get an entry into the contemporary art world, thus profiting from the growing interest and appreciation for the genre. This confirms Van Goidshoven’s findings that outsider art now has a (commercial) appeal that surpasses its own criteria and characteristics (Van Goidshoven, 2016, p. 8).

A museum director said to be wary of the trendiness of outsider art: “It’s now the label of the year but we have to make it stay” (interview 2, museum director). This trendiness is for him not relevant to the ongoing debate about outsider and other art, about what is accepted and what isn’t. As a professional with years of experience, he said that the interest is new, but outsider art is not, “It’s been around for hundreds of years”.

## **5.5 Conclusions**

The findings show that the framing by the different respondents (and often one and the same as well) can be contradictory. Nor generally speaking, within the broader art field, neither within one’s own practice do these curators, studio directors and museum directors try to

establish a fixed position for outsider art. Rather, framing goes hand in hand with strategic goals that depend on the context. In similar vein, we can see their reluctance to define outsider art and pinpoint the characteristics, even though implicitly there exists a level of consensus over various criteria on the level of organizations on what can be outsider art (or in the case of art brut that is accepted as a genre, on the level of a whole art field) as described by Baumann (2007, p. 49). Yet, a wide consensus for outsider art itself seems yet to be reached.

For all but one professionals (a commercial gallery director) outsider art's position is partly defined by social factors. In the attempt of framing outsider art as a legitimate artform, all actors want to remove it from the social atmosphere and regard it purely aesthetically, what results in copying contemporary art world codes (such as formalistic presentations), avoiding giving medical background of the artists, as well as stressing the artistic quality of outsider art and outsider artists that were shown in the museums or exhibitions or worked in the art studios. This went against my expectations based on the theoretical research wherein the mix of social and aesthetic elements seemed a key feature of outsider art.

This can be interpreted as a widespread framing strategy that gives outsider art legitimacy within the art field and steers it away from the social ambit, which indeed was one of the prevalent framing strategies in the discourse of all but one actors. Only for that collaborator of a museum that shows both outsider art and tells the history of psychiatry on the same site, this duality did not affect outsider art as an art form.

Regarding the legitimacy of outsider art within the art field, three interesting framing strategies were identified that could not be split up according to the different groups of professionals, as several of them expressed opposing views within the same interview. They can be grouped under assimilation to, integration in or opposition to contemporary art. In the first case, the focus lies almost only on legitimacy for outsider art as its difference is ruled out and respondents only focused on similarity. The second case is a mix of both where legitimacy doesn't go at the expense of its difference and contemporary art has to adapt itself to outsider art as well. In the last case, outsider art is framed as entirely different in order to focus on its appeal and its unique position vis-a-vis other art worlds. Overall, this shows that inclusion is not the only goal, as a third path or language is sought as well by the gatekeepers.

Though contradictory as they are, these framings do not surprise as it is the answer to the second part of the research question: how do actors deal with the contradiction inherent in outsider art. Indeed, whereas the first two strategies (inclusion and integration) try to give legitimacy to the outsider art world, the latter framing strategy (opposition) serves the goal to

keep outsider art *different*, so that it keeps its identity in this new position within the mainstream.

When it comes to significant differences between the actors, the commercial gallery directors stood out, as he had a clearly defined view on outsider art, which could be a partly commercial inspired position. Though aware of the discussion, he does not doubt what outsider is and where its position is within the field. All art studio collaborators strived for an assimilation or integration of their artists within the contemporary art field, which was also the case of one of the Belgian outsider art museums (that has its roots in the studio field). None of the galleries or art studios could be classified as parallel galleries, what contradicted my expectations, as they placed artistic goals over social ones, but this doesn't mean they can be labeled commercial galleries neither, and their position is thus in-between.

The other museum curators and directors, on the other hand, rather embraced the paradoxical position of outsider art with three of them explicitly stating their museums pose these questions as well. As gatekeepers, their role in the selection and legitimizing process was confirmed, but I have found no direct confirmation of my these as that they have a greater role to frame the works as "art" than in other art fields. They themselves did not confirm this, what also stressed the autonomy of the outsider artworks for them.

The audience, finally, seems affected by the decisions of the gatekeepers, who select the artworks for them. The interviewed visitors did not significantly value outsider art higher or lower than the other artworks they had seen in the exhibitions as, overall, they did not clearly make distinctions nor looked for them. The findings by Ross (2008), White, Kaufman and Riggs (2014), and Fox and Macpherson (2015) could thus not be confirmed by this thesis research.

## 5 CONCLUSION

### 5.1 General Conclusions

This thesis aimed at researching the paradoxical position of outsider art in the art world. Departing from a theoretical description of the evolution and acceptance of outsider art as a form of art, I came to a research approach that intended to see how actors in the art field frame its current position and how they dealt with what I had identified as a paradox in the growing appreciation for outsider art: the need to be *different*, outside the frame, in order to be accepted as this artform that keeps on sparking interest in the mainstream art world.

The findings show that actors in the field actively use this paradox and do not resolve it: similarity to and inclusion in the mainstream can be important when it comes to receiving legitimacy, but this does not exclude that the actors focus on the difference and otherness of outsider art as well at other times. Comparison, also, is a strategy the actors often recur to. The paradox is used in the framing itself and seen as part of the artform by the actors.

The theoretical framework that started with discussions of the field of artists production (Bourdieu, 1983) and art worlds (Becker, 1982) and led me to the identification of gatekeepers, mediators and intermediaries role in processes of framing and legitimacy, has proved useful. The respondents worked as selectors of artworks (Janssen & Verboord, 2015, p. 4), within institutions that functioned as vehicles supporting the stream of creation, circulation and consumption (Joy, 1998, p. 8). In this sense, the mechanisms and trajectories of outsider art proved not to be different from the ones found in contemporary art and in other fields – and respondents made reference to the similarities with the mainstream or contemporary art world, which answers one of my subquestions. Outsider art does not seem to require more or less mediators along the trajectory to become established as “art”.

The framing was used to legitimize outsider art and grant it autonomy as an art form. Baumann’s (Baumann, 2007, p. 55) findings regarding the structural and symbolic tools gatekeepers employ to legitimize art have proved useful and applicable to this field of interest as well: artistic collaborations or high-level exhibition spaces were referred to by the gatekeepers. Additionally, the concept of art worlds led me to recognize the relation between outsider art and the contemporary art world as a key framing element that served several purposes: going from similarity to opposition.

The ambiguity I had theoretically identified as part of outsider art and expected to find in the framing of the actors is confirmed by the empirical research. Yet, when it came to the

social and aesthetical dimension of outsider art, my expectations were overthrown and the framing strategies largely attempted to focus on outsider art's artistic merits over its social aspects. This figured in the greater attempt to legitimize it as art, as the latter weakened its artistic autonomy.

The galleries and art studios figuring in the research cannot be called parallel galleries because creating awareness was never mentioned as their main role by the directors and coordinators, what goes slightly against my expectation. Differences between Belgium and the Netherlands and between the different groups of gatekeepers exist, but mainly give way to new research avenues rather than leading to definitive conclusions. Yet, in the Netherlands, the gatekeepers opted for a more straightforward approach of the inclusion within the contemporary art world whereas in Belgium I found more examples of framing outsider art in-between worlds.

Overall, these conclusions show outsider art has moved into the mainstream and established institutions, but the process of legitimating by the actors from the field goes hand in hand with framings that point out its singularity and difference as much as its similarity with contemporary art. The omnipresent framing of form over function in outsider art, shows us the process of legitimization in action. Yet, the overall ambiguity makes that strict definitions are not applicable, which leaves the door open for appropriation and sometimes trendy use of the name.

The paradox resolved? Rather it still serves as a guiding light for outsider art to find its new position.

## **5.2 Limitations and Further Research**

The limitations of this study are clear in the case of the audience research. To get more results, more data would be needed. In a semi-structured interview it is not easy to get relevant data from (non-professional) art visitor when the question are very specific. Other research methods such as questionnaires (Daenenkindt & Roose, 2014, p. 7, Bryman, 2012, p. 233) could be considered as alternatives.

Due to time limitations the majority of the respondents are Belgian professionals whereas the goal was to study both Belgian and the Netherlands. Within Belgium, a mix of respondents from Flemish, Brussels and Wallonia was interviewed what did provide a broad sample. Further research could evidently include more countries and respondents, as the outsider art world is rather small but very internationally oriented: many respondents referred

me to German, English, Swiss, Austrian, Italian and Japanese persons in the field that could help me with the research. Moreover, significant differences between countries could arise when broadening the scope, as they all have different traditions, some leaning strong on Dubuffet's ideas while in other countries such as Japan a totally different field has developed.

Thought this research included respondents who are both professionally active in the outsider art world and the contemporary art world, the inclusion of more respondents of curators and museum directors from the regular art world could have brought new findings. This research focuses on the ones that (mostly) try to push outsider art into the mainstream art world and their way of doing this. Yet, the way the gatekeepers on the other side, such as the Kunsthal (which did not want to partake in this research), frame outsider art seems a promising path for more research.

Taking on another research method altogether to the field of outsider art could be a promising research avenue as well. For instance, grounded theory or ethnographic research in art studios and museums might bring in data on the practical way of dealing with outsider art of gatekeepers and the position of outsider artists. Although this research addressed the daily practice of the respondents, there might be much more to see about how they actually work than what I have heard from them.

Opening up the picture, this research and the findings made me wonder if the legitimization process of outsider art could in a meaningful way be compared to how other art fields or forms (have) receive(d) legitimacy. I made a small comparison with the evolution of jazz music, but one could compare as well with how relatively new art forms as photography or comics became recognized as art in order to identify general framing and legitimizing strategies. This way, interesting cases could be added to Becker's (in Mauws, 2000, p. 235) and Mauws' (2000, p. 235) theory on art genres and to Lopes' (Lopes, 2006 & Lopes, 2009) studies of jazz music and comics.

Concluding, this research does not paint a definitive picture but rather shows a snapshot of the outsider art field in mid-air, somewhere between getting inside and staying outside. As the findings point out, as art world that makes us question what art is, and wherein the respondents sometimes answer questions with more questions, outsider art often embraces its paradoxical position, proving the post-structural view I proposed as quite applicable. It resists a one-dimensional approach, and the contradictory framing of the respondents is in this sense needed to make outsider art what it is. The identification of the paradoxical nature of outsider art done in the theoretical chapter thus served not only as a theoretical base, but also



helped to interpret the contradictions in the framing, and see that this is what makes outsider art what it is.

Just as the museum director confined me that his museum should not answer but pose questions, hopefully this research relevance lies in the new questions it broaches about art.

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## APPENDIX A: OVERVIEW OF THE RESPONDENTS

This appendix gives an overview of all respondents that participated and feature in this thesis research.

<b>Museum Location</b>	<b>Number, Gender, age Occupation</b>	<b>Sampling method</b>	<b>Meeting, date</b>
Museum Brussels (BE)	1, Female, thirties Director/Exhibitions	Purposive sampling	April 23, 2016
Museum Amsterdam (NL)	2, Male, forties Director	Purposive sampling	April 15, 2016
Museum Liège (BE)	3, Male, thirties Director	Purposive sampling	April 4, 2016
Museum Ghent (BE)	4, Female, thirties Curator, European Projects, Communication	Purposive sampling	March 31, 2016
Museum Ghent (BE)	5, Male, fifties Former Museum Director, Artistic Advisor	Purposive sampling	April 14, 2016
<b>Galleries</b>	<b>Sex, age Function</b>	<b>Sampling method</b>	<b>Meeting, date</b>
Art Gallery Amsterdam (NL)	6, Male, sixties Director	Snowball sampling	April 28, 2016
Art Gallery on the site of a Psychiatric Hospital Brussels (BE)	7, Female, fifties Administrator, Committee member (CM)  7, Female, thirties, Artistic Coordinator, CM  7, Female, fifties Patient, CM  7, Male, thirties Patient, CM  7, Male, forties Patient, CM	Purposive sampling	April 21, 2016



	7, Male, forties Patient, CM  7, Male, fifties Patient, CM  7, Male, forties, Patient, CM  8, Female, thirties Patient, CM		
Art Studio and Gallery Geel (BE)	8, Male, forties Director and Artistic Coordinator	Purposive sampling	April 19, 2016
<b>Atelier – Studio</b>	<b>Name, function, contact</b>	<b>Sampling method</b>	<b>Meeting, date</b>
Art Studio Vielsalm (BE)	9, Female, forties Artistic Director	Snowball sampling	April 4, 2016
Art Studio Vielsalm (BE)	9, Male, thirties Coordinator, Curator	Snowball sampling	April 4, 2016
<b>Other</b>	<b>Gender, age Occupation</b>	<b>Sampling method</b>	<b>Meeting, date</b>
Artist Geel (BE)	10, Male, twenties Independent Curator, Artist and Artistic Coordinator Art Studio	Snowball sampling	April 19, 2016
Artist Geel (BE)	11, Female, twenties Artist and Artistic Coordinator Art Studio	Snowball sampling	April 19, 2016
Arts Agency Amsterdam (NL)	12, Female, forties Director – Arts Consultant	Snowball sampling	April 26, 2016
Arts Agency Amsterdam (NL)	12, Female, forties Director – Arts Consultant	Snowball sampling	April 26, 2016
<b>Museum Visitor Location</b>	<b>Gender, age</b>	/	<b>Interview date</b>
Museum Dr. Guislain Ghent (BE)	13, Male, sixties		March 31, 2016

Museum Dr. Guislain Ghent (BE)	14, Female, fifties		March 31, 2016
Museum Dr. Guislain Ghent (BE)	15, Female, twenties		March 31, 2016
Outsider Art Museum Amsterdam (NL)	16, Female, fifties		April 15, 2016
art)&(marges musée Brussels (BE)	17, Female, forties		May 7, 2016

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDES

The extended interview guides that were used for the semi-structure interviews and the visual stimuli can be found in this appendix.

### 1. Interview guide professional

#### Intro:

Hello, I am Rasmus Van Heddeghem, Master Student at Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam. In the first place, I would like to thank you for the opportunity of interviewing you. This interview is part of my master thesis research. I conduct a research on the role and position of outsider art in the art world and I am interviewing different curators and visitors of outsider art museum. I am most grateful to be able to speak with you, as a curator of a reputed museum.

#### Interview:

##### *Introduction*

First, I would like to ask you what your function is in this museum/exhibition?

Were you familiar with outsider art before or did you get introduced to outsider art thanks to this position?

Then, how long have you been working in the specific field of outsider art?

Could you, briefly, say if you have seen a big evolution within the field of outsider art or around the field? If so, what changes have you observed, and when?

##### *Outsider art*

Do you use the term 'outsider art'? If not, what would or do you call this kind of art and how would you define it?

To what extent do you think this definition is important and does it influence your work within this field?

How do you decide upon the borders of outsider art in your practice? On what criteria do base the decision to include if artworks belong to the group of outsider art or belong to the classic art world? (Here I can refer to Karel Appel as opposed to Adolf Wölfli, for example).

(Why) do you differentiate between both forms of art?

Why are these borders that define outsider art important?

*The exhibition – project in question*

Does the exhibition you have curated / the show you have organized / the selection you have made include outsider and non-outsider art?

If so, why? Did you bring in the both forms of art deliberately and with a specific goal?

What influenced on this decisions? Was it the theme of the exhibition or the nature of some specific works that made you do so?

Do you regularly combine outsider and non-outsider art in exhibitions? What is the reason or are the reasons to do so?

How does your stance on this topic differ from that of other curators, institutions or collaborators (both within and outside the organization you work for)?

*Bringing outsider art in the museums or galleries*

Is there a difference between the way you deal with outsider art and non-outsider art? Where does this difference comes from and what are these differences? Can you give practical examples of this?

Which factors cause this different ways of dealing with it?

Does it has to do with the (reactions of) the audiences or with the (image of) the museum?

There are museums dedicated to outsider art exhibiting non-outsider art as well and vice versa. What do you think of this? In what way does this ‘border-crossing’ affect the position of outsider art?

In what way would your work be different if you worked in a (non-)outsider museum<sup>14</sup>?

What barriers do you have to overcome when working with outsider art in museum s or institutions?

Does the prestige or reputation of the place where the exhibition is held influence on your work?

To what extent is it more difficult or more easy for audiences to connect with outsider art?

*Outsider art: aesthetical or functional?*

To what extent does outsider art need more care or context when you exhibit it?

If it needs more care or context, why and for whom?

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<sup>14</sup> Depending on the actual place where the respondents works.

Did you already have to deal with criticism for any situation involving the combination of outsider and non-outsider art? How did you react to it?

Is there a certain discretion needed when exhibiting art from mentally ill persons? Do you take in account ethic consideration, and how to they differ from the considerations you deal with when working with other artists?

How do you deal with the position of the art viewers / the visitors? To what extent do you want to make them aware of the position, life, medical history of the artist?

Are the artists or artworks that stretch the borders of outsider art to its limits? If so, which ones, and why? How do you deal with this art?

### *Moving into the mainstream*

Not only museums are exhibiting outsider art today, there is an inclusion of outsider art in the art market as well. How do you see this evolution?

Have you observed a subsequent evolution in the valuation of outsider art as a genre over time? How did the perception and valuing of outsider art evolve?

Was this an evolution sparked by individual acts or did you see a bigger plan? To what extent has the changing society contributed to this evolutions? Then, who or what would you name ass main contributors to this evolution?

How did this evolution influence on the side of the artists and how did it influence on the side of the art viewers?

It is said that outsider art has had its 'golden age' at the time the term art brut was coined by Jean Dubuffet. To what extent do you agree with this vision? How do you differentiate between 'original' outsider art and contemporary outsider art, then?

What would it mean if outsider art became a commonly used label in, for example, museums? Can you imagine a major modern art museum including a wing or gallery of outsider art? And why would (or wouldn't) you support this?

### *The legitimization of outsider art*

To what extent does outsider art has to legitimize itself today?

Has there been an evolution in the legitimizing process of outsider art or of the museum you work for?

Would you support an evolution towards a situation in which the specific qualities of outsider arts are not anymore mentioned when it is exhibited? Is this even a possibility?

Are there any actors you deem specifically important for outsider art to be accepted?

So, how do you see the contemporary position of outsider art? Where to will it evolve, in your view?

### *The role of the curator*

How does the selection or information gathering process of outsider art differ from that of non-outsider art?

On what sources, institutions or media do you rely?

How does the role of the curator change when dealing with outsider art (whether or not in combination with non-outsider art)?

What is your view of the importance of curators and other actors in the legitimizing or creation of outsider art?

To what extent do you (dis)agree that it is not the artist but the mediator who decides what is art, in the case of outsider art?

How do you see the opposition between being a selector or a (co-)creator of the artworks you decide to exhibit in the case of outsider art?

How important do you find it to 'discover' new outsider art or make visitors discover new outsider art?

### *The paradoxical nature of outsider art*

How does outsider art challenge the way art is perceived and evaluated?

What do you think of the paradox that outsider art has to be on the outside of the art world to be considered art by this very art world? What does this reveal about outsider art as a genre, its position and that of the artists?

Is this an observation you have to deal with in your practice as curator?

In what lies the appeal of outsider art for you?

### Conclusion:

Thank you for this interview. I have been able to touch upon all topics I wanted to talk about. Is there anything you would like to add or comment upon? Is there a theme we have not fully treated the way you wanted?

If not, thank you again.

## **2. Interview guide for a museum visitor**

### Intro:

Hello, I am Rasmus Van Heddeghem, Master Student at Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam. I am working on a thesis on outsider art and how museum visitor see this art. I would like to ask you a few questions, if you have time for this.

The interview will be anonymous, but will be recorded (if you agree on this). The results will serve for this thesis research and help me to get conduct a research on how outsider art is seen and valued.

Thank you for taking the time to answer some questions.

### Interview:

#### *Introduction*

First, I would like to ask you how you decided to visit this museum/exhibition? Did the fact that it exhibits outsider art played a role in this decision?

Is it the first time you go see an exhibition with art made by outsiders?

Does it matter for you that contemporary recognized artists and outsider are presented in the same exhibition? Did you try to figure out who was who?

#### *Outsider art*

Are you familiar with the term outsider art and if so, what does it mean for you?

(Why) do you make the difference between outsider art and non-outsider art?

In what lies the appeal of art made by outsider for you?

#### *The exhibition – project in question*

Do you regularly visit (art) exhibitions?

To what extent did the fact that the art inside was made by outsider influence your experience?

How would you describe your visit to the exhibition? And was it different than other exhibitions?

### *Outsider art in the museums or galleries*

Do you want to know the context of the artworks you have seen, and did it influence if the artwork was made by an outsider?

Do you think it is important these artworks are displayed in museums? And why?

Do you prefer to go see outsider art in a specific museum or would you also want to see it in regular museums?

Did you observe a difference in the way you look at or react to art made by outsiders or by established artists? Did the story of the artist influence on how you looked at the artworks?

### *Outsider art: aesthetical or functional?*

To what extent do you think some of these artworks of outsiders need to be contextualized and handled with care?

If it needs more care or context, why and for whom?

Can you imagine critique on this exhibition? And why?

To what extent do you think the museum is responsible of giving the full story of the artists whose work is on display?

### *Moving into the mainstream*

Would you consider buying art made by outsiders? What could influence this decision?

Do you think more art made by outsiders should be exhibited? And if so, where?

### *The legitimization of outsider art*

Do you think the works made by outsiders are art? Why or why not? Where do you place the border between what is and what isn't art?

For whom can these works made by outsider be important? (for the artists themselves, for the visitors, for doctors, ...?)

Can a painting from an outsider hang next to any other painting made by a renowned artist in your view?



Why do you think it is or isn't important to have a category of 'outsider art' that refers to art that is not part of the normal art world? Who do you think decides what is outsider art and what isn't? Is this useful?

### *The role of the curator*

Do you think museums, media or other organizations should give more information about outsider art, or more attention to outsider art?

Can something be art for you and not for somebody else because the maker was an outsider? Whereupon can someone base his ideas to say something is or isn't art in such a case?

### *The paradoxical nature of outsider art*

In what way has this exhibition changed the way you look at art?

In what way has this exhibition changed the way you look at outsiders?

Do you think it is paradoxical art made by outsiders is called art by this museum, or by us, as we speak about it?

Did you think about this in the exhibition and what made you think this?

### *Visual Stimuli*

[The six visual stimuli are one by one, in an random order, shown to the respondents. Basic questions are asked about every image they get.]

Is this painting art? Why (not)?

Could this be hung in a museum? Why do you think this could be hung in a museum, on what criteria do you base this idea?

Which information that you get do you find relevant when looking at these paintings? Which one is not relevant? What kind of information would you want as well?

When the person has seen all six paintings, a few extra questions are asked.

Would you be surprised to see any of these paintings in a museum?

Which belong in a museum, and which don't? Why (not)?

Could you separate these paintings in groups of outsider artists and normal artists? Why (not)? How would you make this separation? And whereon would you base this separation?

### Conclusion:

Thank you for this interview. I have been able to ask you everything I wanted. Is there anything you would like to add or comment upon?

If not, thank you again.

## **3. Visual Stimuli**

### **3.1 Karen Brown – Blue Carpet (1989)**

- American Artist
- No education in arts
- Started painting and drawing in prison
- No major recognition or museum shows (died in 1995)



### **3.2 Raymond Morris – The Caterpillar's tongue (no date)**

- British artist
- Self declared 'extrakter' that responds to what spirits reveal to him
- Paints during meditative sessions
- Hardly exhibits or sells any works as 'nobody understands his works' and lives as a recluse



### 3.3 Willem Van Genk – Self Portrait in the Ark (1974)

- Dutch artist
- Suffered from attacks of paranoia and schizophrenia
- Living secluded from the society and art world
- Sporadic exhibitions in galleries



### 3.4 Bart Baele – Moi, Bart Baele, Médecin, Neurologue, Psychiatre de la Justice (1987)

- Belgian artist
- Uses his fear, pain and his psychological distress as themes of his work
- Sporadic exhibitions in (mostly) specialised galleries
- Has a medical record of hospitalisations



### 3.5 Serge Vandercam – L'homme de Tollund (2008)

- Danish-Belgian artist
- Part of the international CoBrA movement
- Works in the line of surrealist experimentations
- Shows in art museums during his life, today his works can be found in the collection of the Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium, among other museums.



### 3.6 Edvard Munch – Seated Nude and three male Heads (1985)

- Norwegian artist living at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century
- Influenced by Symbolism and Expressionism

- Has a history of mental breakdown and suffered from severe depression
- One of the most influential artist from the past century whose artworks can be found in many of the most famous museums worldwide



## **APPENDIX C: CODE OVERVIEW**

This appendix gives an overview of the four major ways of codes that were used in the coding of the interviews.

### **1. Structural Coding**

Relevant codes that are linked to the research question and the theoretical concepts of the research were:

- Defining Outsider Art
- Otherness/Difference
- Outsider Art vs. Contemporary Art (equal [=], integration, opposition)
- Social vs. Aesthetic Dimensions
- Label(ling)
- The curator

### **2. Descriptive codes**

Recurring codes emerging from the data:

- Contradiction
- Evolution
- Art Brut

### **3. In vivo coding**

Coding used for the remarkable use of certain words:

- “Interesting”
- “Quality”
- Art Brut, “classic”, “canon”, “established”

### **4. Values coding**

Value coding was mostly used to identify the attitudes and values of the respondents towards larger themes or concepts identified in prior coding sessions, such as the mentioning of medical and/or social elements related to outsider art.