

Future of Art in Eswatini Report 2024

Prepared by Yebo Art Gallery & Antidote Culture Foundation

Executive Summary

In a bid to determine the future of visual arts in Eswatini, Yebo Art Gallery and Antidote Culture Foundation organized a workshop with 24 Eswatini-based visual artists, including painters, photographers, sculptors, and mixed media artists. The workshop aimed to understand the realities for artists living in Eswatini, identify challenges, and collaborate on potential solutions and opportunities. Titled “The Future of Art in Eswatini,” the event was part of the collaborative ‘Yini Loku’ creative hub initiative by Yebo Art Gallery and Antidote Culture Foundation.

Held on June 29, 2024, at Yebo Art Gallery in Ezulwini, the workshop featured presentations on offerings by Yebo Art Gallery and Yini Loku, an open discussion and Q&A session, and a survey filled out by all participants. This report is based on the feedback from that survey, covering topics such as artists’ annual income from art sales, challenges faced, career development needs, art business practices, social media impact, the role of local creative organizations, and future plans.

The insights gathered highlight significant challenges including limited market access, economic constraints, and a need for institutional support. Artists expressed a strong desire for improved infrastructure, such as online sales platforms and educational initiatives, to foster artistic growth. Moving forward, addressing these challenges will require concerted efforts to enhance visibility, access to opportunities, and support systems for artists in Eswatini.

Disclaimer: The following information is based on survey responses from 24 artists based in Eswatini who attended the workshop, thus representing a sample of the artist community in the country.

Visual Artists’ Demographic Information

Age: The survey showed that a majority of local artists are between the ages of 20 - 30, followed by the 31-40 demographic. There seems to be a growth in emerging young artists which is a positive thing - more young Swazis are embracing and exploring their creative passions.

- 46% were between the ages 20-30
- 25% were between the ages of 31 - 40
- 21% were between the ages of 41 - 65
- 8% were above the age of 65

Gender: Figure 1 shows that of the artists present at the workshop, 62.5% identified as men, 29.2% identified as women and 8.3% identified as non-binary.

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Gender?
24 responses

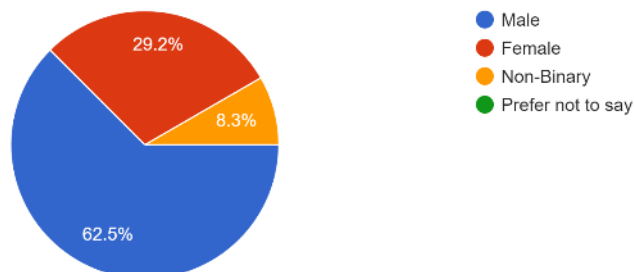


Figure 1

Visual Artists' Career Backgrounds

As seen in Figure 2 a majority (50%) of artists have been practicing for over 20 years, while over 20% have been practicing for less than 3 years, followed by those who have been practicing for 3-5 years (16.7%), showing that there are almost 40% emerging visual artists in Eswatini. This can also be seen by the number of young artists who have showcased their work at both Yini Loku and Yebo Art Gallery in the past year alone. There is definitely a resurgence of interest in pursuing art in Eswatini.

How long have you been working as an artist?
24 responses

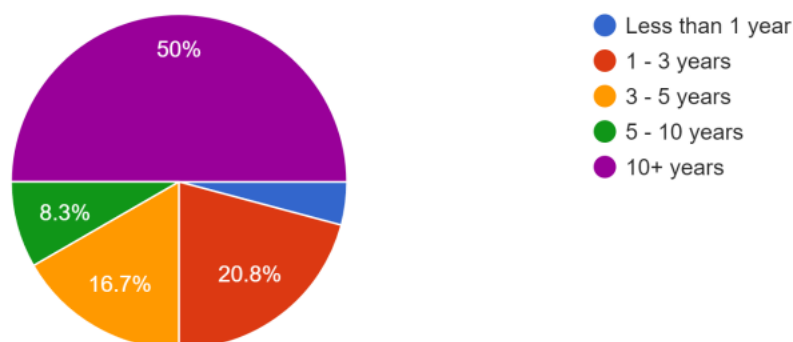


Figure 2

Type of artists represented: Of the artists participating in the workshop who responded to the survey, a majority (58.3%) are painters, followed by 41.7% who draw, 25% illustrators and 20% photographers. Film, sculpture and other creatives were the minority. Some artists do more than one type of visual art, hence the numbers reflected in Figure 3.

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What kind of art do you create?

24 responses

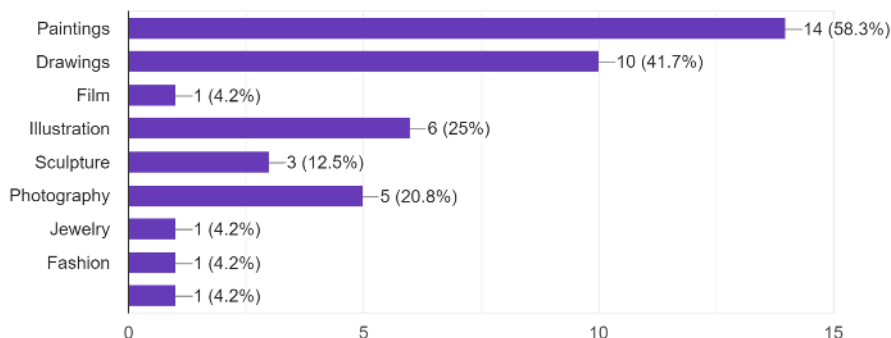


Figure 3

The survey also revealed that a surprising 58.3% of the artists present were full time artists, while 41.7% were doing art part time - as seen in Figure 4. In addition 55% reported that they can earn a living from pursuing their art full time, while 45% said they could not (as seen in Figure 5). This was surprising as Eswatini is not a conducive environment for a creative career. It was inspiring to see that a large proportion of the respondents were pursuing an artistic career fulltime in spite of the challenges, which will be shared in this report.

Are you an artist full time?

24 responses

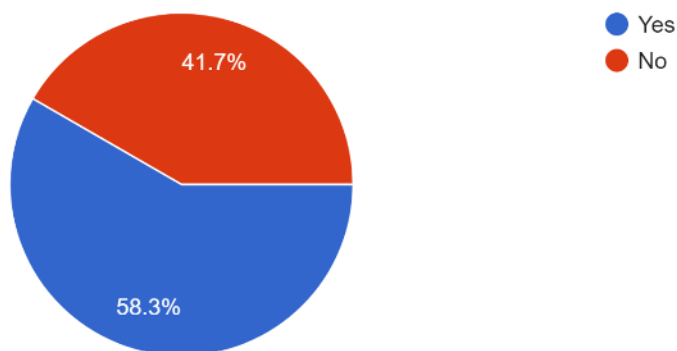


Figure 4

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If yes, can you earn a living being a fulltime artist?

20 responses

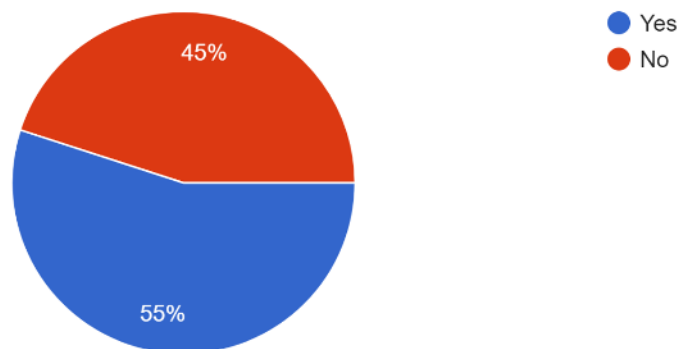


Figure 5

Those who said they could not earn a living as full time artists shared their other sources of income. They are listed below:

- Other creative projects
- Airbnb
- Working in architecture
- Commercial Photography and videography
- Teaching art
- Entrepreneurship
- Supported by spouse
- Facilitating workshops
- Part time NGO work, mostly graphic design
- Freelance work and odd jobs
- Internships

Income from Art

On the subject of income, the survey showed that the majority of artists are making less than E30,000 annually from art sales. 33.3% reported to be making less than E5,000 per annum, 29.2 % making up to E10,000 per annum, 25% making up to E30,000 per annum, 8.3% making up to E50,00 per annum, and 4.2% making above E100,000 from art per annum. See Figure 6.

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How much do you make on average from your art annually?

24 responses

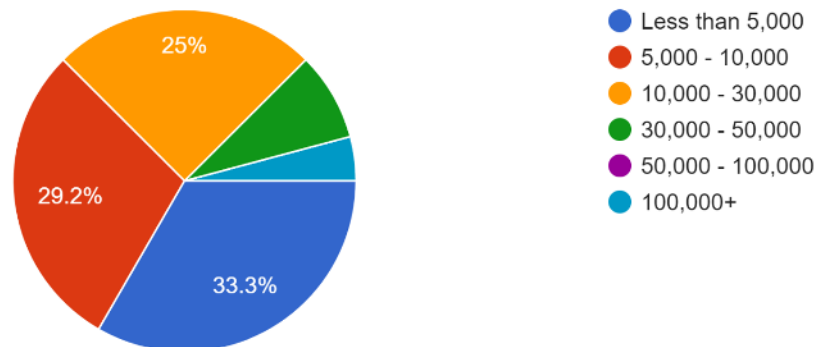


Figure 6

On the subject of income artists were asked what they felt about paying commissions to galleries and agents, a majority expressed that they had no problem with paying commissions if the percentage commission taken was justified, fair, and made financial sense to all parties involved, and no one is being taken advantage of. Typically galleries will take a percentage of art sales to cover their administration costs.

Sales on social media: only 25% of artists reported having made sales via social media, making gallery sales the majority of art sales. Online sales are currently not a viable option in Eswatini as E-commerce is near non-existent without safe payment gateways.

Challenges Faced by Visual Artists

Survey responses from 24 Eswatini-based artists highlighted several significant challenges impacting their careers and the growth of the visual arts sector in the country:

1. Market Access and Exposure:

- Limited opportunities and/or platforms to showcase and sell art locally (few art galleries and creative spaces available for exhibitions, and few buyers of art).
- Apathy and lack of interest from the general public, who are potential customers.
- Need for payment gateways to access international markets.

2. Financial Constraints:

- Difficulty earning a sustainable income from art.
- Art is considered a luxury item, and not a necessity - resulting in low sales.
- Lack of buyers and purchasing power within the local economy.

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3. **Support and Recognition:**

- Insufficient support from the corporate sector and government.
- Lack of understanding and appreciation of contemporary art.
- Few opportunities for artists to receive recognition and support.

4. **Professional Development and Education:**

- Need for more art schools, residencies, and funding for educational programs for artists.
- Limited opportunities for artists to learn and develop their skills.

5. **Community and Collaboration:**

- Lack of teamwork and collaboration among artists.
- Instances of selfishness and greed hinder collective progress.
- Negative feedback and lack of encouragement from friends and family.

6. **Economic Impact:**

- Poor economic conditions affecting the ability to sell and purchase art.
- Small market size makes it challenging for art to be a viable career option.

Career Development Needs Identified by Visual Artists

Survey responses from 24 Eswatini-based artists highlighted the following key needs to help grow their careers:

1. **Collaboration and Networking:**

- Interaction with well-established artists
- Participation in art groups, festivals, competitions, and residencies
- Access to art fairs and studio visits

2. **Market Access and Exposure:**

- Increased exposure in the art market space
- Expansion of marketing efforts, both locally and internationally
- Online sales platforms, including websites and possibly NFTs

3. **Support and Mentorship:**

- Funding and mentorship programs
- Support from family and society at large
- Mentorship and guidance from experienced art practitioners

4. **Resources and Infrastructure:**

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- Access to materials and equipment
- Establishment of a professional studio space open to artists to use to create art
- Capacity building on building professional websites and creating communities through social media as a means to build an artist's profile and income streams.

5. Education and Skill Development:

- Learning about the art business
- Learning marketing strategies
- Continuous education on technical, artistic, and financial aspects of art
- Understanding how to navigate and utilize available resources effectively
- Learning how to improve writing for professional profiles, proposals and applications for opportunities

Future Plans

Seeing the various highlighted challenges and needs, when asked if they are considering seeking opportunities outside the country the survey showed an overwhelming response, with 62.5% local artists considering leaving the country to pursue sustainable creative careers. See Figure 7.

Are you thinking of leaving for SA or overseas?

24 responses

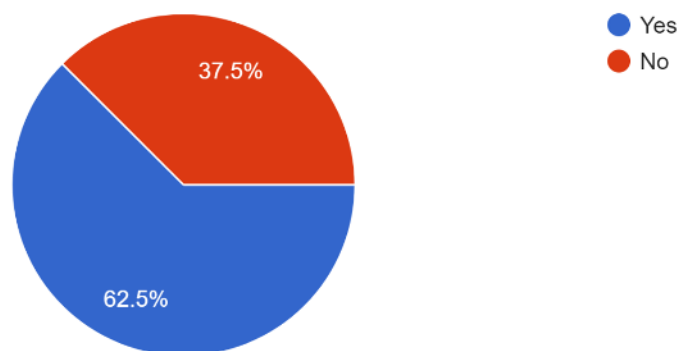


Figure 7

Art Pricing & Business Practices

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Perceptions on the Pricing of Art in Eswatini

The general consensus is that art prices in Eswatini are too low, primarily due to the economic conditions and what people can afford. The key issues with art pricing that were highlighted are as follows:

1. **Economic Impact:** Prices are kept low to align with the local economy, limiting the financial viability for artists.
2. **Quality and Standards:** Some artists feel that the standard of work needs to improve to justify higher prices.
3. **Inconsistencies in Pricing:** There are significant inconsistencies in how artists price their work, suggesting a need for gallery or other interventions to standardize and support fair pricing both locally and internationally.
4. **Comparison with South Africa:** Prices in Eswatini are extremely low compared to neighboring South Africa.
5. **Personal Pricing Strategies:** Many artists feel that they price their work lower than they would prefer due to the local economic constraints and the non-commercial nature of their art. Some artists reportedly base their prices on the time invested in creating the artwork.

Overall, the feedback highlights a disparity between the value of the art and the prices artists are able to charge, which is influenced by economic limitations and market conditions.

Personal Development: 100% of the artists expressed that they invest in their personal development through reading, research, artistic exploration. See Figure 8. Figure 9 shows that a majority of local artists feel they need to improve their communication skills and knowledge of art business practices.

Do you spend time reading, researching, and thinking of original concepts to explore in your work?.

24 responses

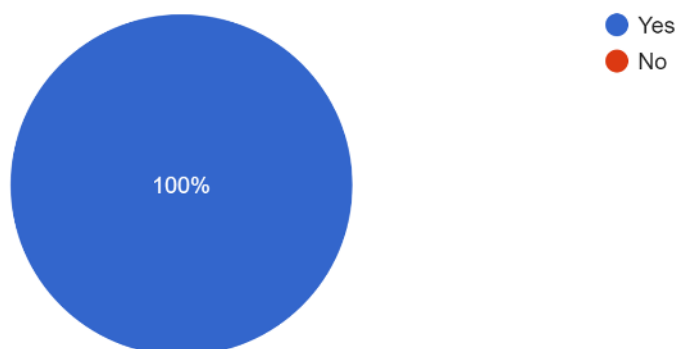


Figure 8

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Do you feel your communication skills are good and do you understand best business practices when you deal with galleries or clients?

24 responses

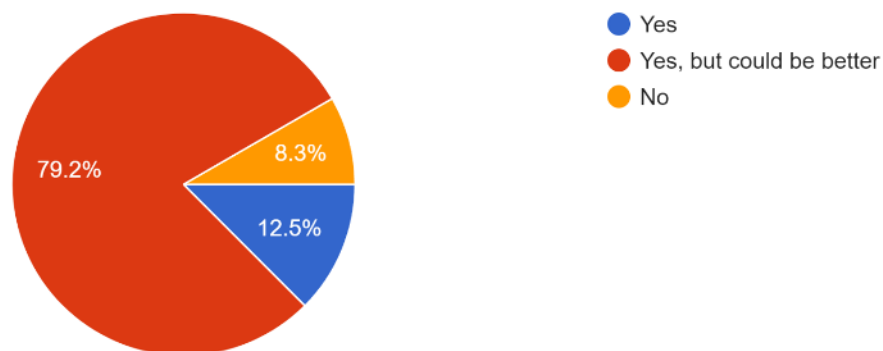


Figure 9

When surveyed about applying for art opportunities, responses revealed the following:

- **Art Residencies:** 25% have applied, while 75% have not. One artist suggested that a notice board or monthly newsletter listing relevant opportunities would be helpful.
- **Grants:** 21% have applied, while 79% have not.
- **Art Competitions:** 39% have applied, while 61% have not.

These figures indicate that most artists are not actively applying for residencies, grants, or competitions, highlighting a need for better access to information and writing capacity building.

Social Media and Online Sales

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Are you on social media?

23 responses

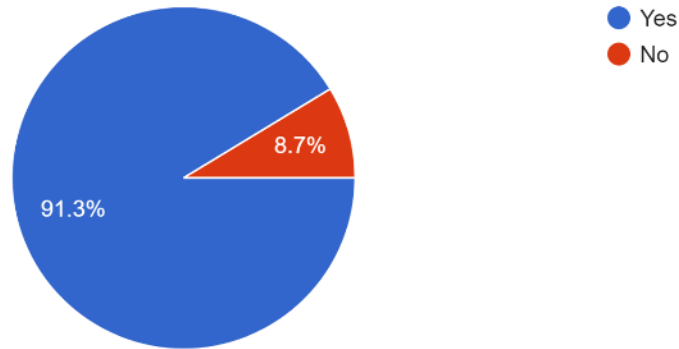


Figure 10

Pros and cons of Social Media

Pros of Social Media		Cons of Social Media
1	Increased Exposure: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visual presentation of art• Exposure to international opportunities such as residencies and art competitions	Time and Effort: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Constant need to update social media pages

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to reach new markets and keep existing markets updated 	
2	<p>Networking and Collaboration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication with curators Opportunity to collaborate with other artists Connecting with incredible artists worldwide 	<p>Intellectual Property Issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work gets copied/reproduced by other artists without consent Other users may use work without consent
3	<p>Marketing and Sales:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Great marketing platform Ability to work for yourself Sharing work with targeted groups and curated audiences Control over how art is displayed and engaged with Positive feedback and acceptance from the online community Potential to earn income 	<p>Financial Costs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expensive in terms of sourcing out materials for content creation
4	<p>Learning and Inspiration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Source for learning and boosting creativity Therapeutic benefits 	<p>Unpredictability and Negative Impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unpredictable effects on an artist's career Potential to negatively change how artists see and value their work

Concerns About Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Overall, the majority of artists (close to 70%) are concerned about AI's impact on their careers and the authenticity of art, acknowledging both threats and potential shifts in value. Key concerns include:

- **Plagiarism and Jeopardy:** AI plagiarizes and jeopardizes income generation for artists.
- **Impact on the Art Landscape:**
 - AI has already changed the art landscape significantly.

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- Entire departments have been eradicated due to AI.
- Even galleries have been deceived by AI-generated art.
- **Threat to Artist Careers:**
 - AI poses a major threat to artist careers and the art process itself.
- **Value of Man-Made Art:**
 - Despite the threats, man-made art has seen an increase in value because it is becoming rarer.
 - In the long term, original art may become more valuable, but the transition period will be challenging.

Impact of Local Organizations

While one of the challenges expressed was the need for more creative spaces and organisations to help boost the visual arts sector, there are existing spaces and organisations dedicated to supporting the arts in the various forms. Artists were asked to indicate how helpful the following organisations and spaces have been, and whether or not they had engaged them. The results vary.

Yebo Art Gallery: 79% of the artists have engaged with and found the gallery to be helpful, while 21% had not engaged and/or worked with the gallery.

Yini Loku: Creative Hub in Mbabane established as a collaboration between Yebo Art Gallery and Antidote Culture Foundation. In the 7 months that the space has been open to the public, 38% of the artists have engaged with and found it helpful, while 62% have not engaged and/or worked with the space for showcases or collaborations.

MTN Bushfire Festival: 21% of the artists have engaged with and found the event helpful, with 79% not having engaged and/or worked with the festival in terms of showcasing or collaborations.

Alliance Française de Mbabane: 33% of the artists have engaged with and found the organisation helpful, with 67% not having engaged and/or worked with the organisation for showcasing or collaborations.

Eswatini National Council of Arts & Culture: 13% of the artists have engaged with and found the organisation helpful, with 87% not having engaged and/or worked with the organisation.

Other spaces that local artists use which help with promoting their work?

- Eswatini Observer, The Times of Eswatini, Eswatini Financial Times
- Bahle Gallery
- Heaven Paint and Sip - The Wine Boutique
- House Music Festival
- Latitudes online Creatives auction 1ma collective - Johannesburg

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- Spaza Art Gallery, Varia Art Gallery and Living Arts Emporium. All in Johannesburg
- FNB Art - Johannesburg

Community and Collaboration

Do you get asked to do murals/art for free for exposure?

24 responses

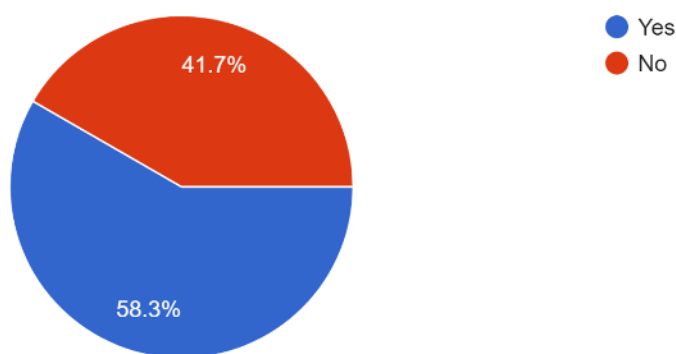


Figure 11

Figure 11 shows that 58.3% of the artists have been asked to do artwork for free/exposure, which is quite concerning and revealing of how art is valued locally. When asked to do free artwork for exposure, artists have varied responses. Many reject such requests outright, viewing them as exploitation of their time and skills, and insist on compensation. Some artists conditionally agree based on who is asking, occasionally doing free work for certain individuals or organisations. There is a willingness to volunteer for community projects that empower those without access to art. In addition, past experiences of not being credited for their work have led some artists to now require a deposit before starting any work. Additionally, while artists may choose to donate their time and work to specific organizations, they oppose companies that exploit artists by not paying for their services.

Recommendations for Improvement

The following are key recommendations for improvement in the local visual arts sector. By implementing these solutions, artists in Eswatini aim to overcome existing challenges and foster a thriving visual arts community:

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1. **Online Access and Sales:**

- Enabling artists to sell their work online globally from Eswatini.
- Establishing effective payment systems for international sales.

2. **Government Support:**

- Establishing an arts council to support and promote the arts through grants, funding, and organizing events.
- Investing in public art projects such as murals and sculptures.
- Collaborating with galleries to support the arts sector.

3. **Corporate Involvement:**

- Encouraging corporates to create more art competitions and actively pay artists what they deserve.
- Increasing corporate sponsorship and support for the arts.

4. **Skill Development and Networking:**

- Organizing workshops for skill improvement and networking opportunities.
- Promoting the understanding of art as a business and encouraging learning from industry veterans.

5. **Community and Collaboration:**

- Holding regular meetings for artists to share ideas, challenges, and support each other.
- Fostering a unified collective front and promoting unity and collaboration among artists.
- Putting on impressive exhibitions despite economic challenges, leveraging online visibility.

6. **Infrastructure Development:**

- Establishing a permanent art museum to preserve local work.
- Creating a professional art college to enhance formal art education.

7. **International Exposure:**

- Focusing on residencies and opportunities overseas.
- Increasing the number of international shows for local artists.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the insights gathered from Eswatini-based visual artists highlight significant challenges and diverse perspectives within the local art community. Artists expressed concerns about limited market access, economic constraints, and a lack of institutional support. Despite these obstacles, there is a clear

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desire for improved infrastructure, such as online sales platforms and educational initiatives, to foster artistic growth. The survey also underscored the importance of collaboration, both within the artistic community and with external partners like galleries and government entities. Moving forward, addressing these challenges will require concerted efforts to enhance visibility, access to opportunities, and support systems for artists in Eswatini.