What follows is a brief report summarizing the results from this project.

***Background***. The goal of this study was to examine the cognitive processes that underlie the aesthetic experience. This study is one piece of a larger project that will continue into the coming year.

The focus of this study was on examining how trained artists or those with extensive background in the arts or art history perceive and process visual art. There is long history of research showing differences between art experts and novices when they judge aesthetic objects (Cupchik & Gebotys, 1990; Eysenck & Castle, 1970; Hekkert, Peper, & van Wieringen, 1994; Hekkert & van Wieringen, 1996; Schmidt, McLaughlin, & Leighten, 1989; Winston & Cupchik, 1992). One area where these differences have not been explored is how experts and novices may differ on integrating verbal information (e.g., titles appearing with artworks) with visual information (the artwork images). Studies have shown that the inclusion of titles with visual art affects viewers’ reactions to artworks (Belke et al., 2010; Gerger & Leder, 2015; Leder, Carbon, & Ripsas, 2006; Millis, 2001; Russell, 2003; Russell & Milne, 1997; Swami, 2013; Thӧmmes & Hübner, 2014). However, the role of expertise in the verbal/visual integration has not been studied.

***Methodology***. In the present study, 26 trained experts with extensive experience in formal education in the studio arts, professional experience in producing/selling/marketing visual art, or extensive formal knowledge of art history were tested. The artists met criteria for expert status via scores on three instruments designed to assess artistic background and experience (the Aesthetic Fluency Scale, the Art Experience Questionnaire, and the Creative Achievement Questionnaire).

Participants were presented with 24 digitized abstract paintings with false titles on a laptop computer. There were two types of titles: Descriptive and Elaborative. Descriptive titles were concrete and straightforward, e.g. “Curved Lines” and “Red and Brown Surface.” Elaborative titles were more abstract and esoteric, e.g. “Sabotage” and “Wanderlust.” Participants viewed each painting and were asked to rate it on two 7-point scales for Liking and Understanding.

***Goals***. There were two goals for the study. The first was to assess the correlation between liking and understanding and the second was to assess the integration of title with artwork. Ultimately, the results must be compared to a control group of novices who do not possess the same degree of artistic knowledge or experience.

***Correlation between Liking and Understanding***. There were significant positive correlations between liking and understanding for both artworks with descriptive titles (r = .64) and artworks with elaborative titles (r = .46). In other works, if the artwork was understood fairly well, it was also liked more.

***Ratings of Liking and Understanding across Title***. For judgments of liking, the artwork was rated significantly higher for liking if the artwork was accompanied by an elaborative title (4.62 for elaborative titles and 4.20 for descriptive titles, respectively). For judgments of understanding, no significant difference in rating between titles was observed (5.04 for elaborative and 5.18 for descriptive, respectively).

***Implications*.** The overall implications of the present study cannot be fully detailed until the control group of novices is run and compared to the group of experts. However, the results as they stand so far are intriguing. The correlation of liking with understanding is interesting, in that the cognitive aspects of understanding the intention of the artist and the conceptual aspects of the artwork are linked to the affective aspects of personal liking for the artwork for people who are art experts. For novices, I would expect that these two aspects of processing the artworks may not be linked as closely.

For type of title, descriptive titles are more easily processed and presumably invoke what are termed System 1 (automatic) neurocognitive processes in the brain, while elaborative titles are more difficult to process and require System 2 (controlled) neurocognitive processes. For understanding, the type of title makes no difference. This makes sense as artists are presumably highly capable of understanding the integration of title (regardless of type of title) with artwork. For novices, I would expect that descriptive titles would be rated higher for understanding than elaborative titles, as their knowledge and experience of abstract art is limited and their ability to integrate more esoteric verbal titles with the artwork is more limited.

For liking, artists liked the abstract paintings more if they were accompanied by an elaborative title. This suggests that a deeper, more insightful processing and integration of the title with artwork resulted in better liking. For novices, I would expect that the type of title may not affect liking, with novices “picking off” the artwork imagery for a liking judgment, with little integration of title.

Another important aspect of the study is that we used a comprehensive set of three standardized measures to assess artistic background. This will allow us to conduct correlational analyses between the questionnaire data and the rating data to assess whether formal training, artistic production, or art history knowledge is responsible for the cognitive processing differences between experts and novices. Other researchers who have studied differences between experts and novices usually rely on one instrument only, thus restricted to assessing only a singular aspect of artistic experience.

***Future Research***. Another piece of future research is to replicate the present study with the additional manipulation of cognitive load. As shown in our previous research using this methodology, it can be used to specifically index whether System 1 or System 2 neurocognitive processes are being used while viewing and processing visual art. This study provides the added benefit of establishing a participant pool of experts that I can draw upon in a future experiment to examine this issue more thoroughly.

***Dissemination***. Next semester, my students and I will run the comparison group of novices. The results will be written up and sent out for publication to the appropriate journal for this work such as *Empirical Studies of the Arts* or *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*.