



AUTHORIAL RECOGNITION OF THE PRODUCTION DESIGN IN SPANISH AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTIONS: An Analysis from the Profession's Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This manuscript aims to assess the perception of production design professionals regarding authorship and the recognition of their craft. The methodology combines both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. The surveyed sample (n=54) exhibits a gender-balanced distribution. Of those surveyed, 51.9% consider the greatest barrier they encounter to be the public's lack of awareness regarding the role of the art department. Only 5.6% of the respondents felt that their work has not been undervalued compared to other roles (particularly cinematography).

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1. Introduction

Authorship is currently a subject of debate across various fields and approaches. It ranks among the flagship topics in Communication Studies and Cultural Studies and constitutes a fruitful line of research within the cinematic sphere, particularly since the emergence of the *politique des auteurs*, which placed the director's creative and driving force at the centre. However, this conception was soon challenged by structuralist and poststructuralist studies (Barthes, 1968; Foucault, 1969), which dissolved the figure of the author as the origin of meaning. Since then, the notion of authorship has been a contested terrain, oscillating between the creator's intent, industrial mediation, and cultural reception. Eco (1993) conceived of the figure of the total director-author as a discursive entity, while Zumalde (2021) argues that the *politique des auteurs* made the decisive contribution of grounding the reflection on authorship on the firm terrain of discourse.

In recent decades, the shift towards more collaborative and less hierarchical approaches has led to a rethinking of authorship as a collective process (Staiger, 2003). Consequently, the debate has shifted towards a notion of shared authorship, in line with the actual practices of audiovisual production. In the audiovisual sector, the boundaries of authorship have been reconsidered in the era of media convergence and platformisation. From Cultural Studies, television studies, and the proliferation of platform-based audiovisual content, there has emerged a plural, collective, and multiaxial re-reading of authorship: while showrunners have gained greater notoriety and recognition as authors, in many other crafts—such as art direction—voices are beginning to assert authorship.

One of the most innovative strands in recent authorship studies is the reclamation of figures traditionally invisibilised in filmic discourse. Puerto Collado's (2022) thesis on the art direction of Benjamín Fernández highlights how production design not only contributes decisively to the visual and plastic aesthetics of a work but also constitutes a language with its own intentionality, capable of shaping meaning and an authorial atmosphere. His holistic approach to each project—where there is scarcely any difference between the design and the final image we see on screen—positions him as a co-author of the audiovisual work alongside the director, the screenwriter, or the composer (Collado Rueda, 2022).

This same process of visibilisation also affects costume design or dressmaking, a historically feminised field relegated to a secondary role in film analysis. Researchers such as Díaz-Moreno (2020) and Buckley & Fawcett (2002) have begun to construct a critical theory of cinematic costume design from a feminist and materialist perspective, recognising its narrative potency and authorial capacity. At an associative level, professional collectives such as the Asociación de Artistas Plásticos, Escénicos y Audiovisuales de España (AAPEE) and the Asociación Española de Dirección Artística Audiovisual (AEDAA) are increasingly advocating for the creative and authorial dimension of their crafts, challenging the primacy of the director as the sole creative instance. This phenomenon forms part of a broader trend pivoting towards a new statute of authorial recognition within the audiovisual sector. Internationally, the Production Designers Collective (DPC) organises events such as the International Production Design Week (IPDW) or the Production Design Research and Education Network (PD-REN), hosting congresses and workshops, addressing the fundamental yet overlooked role of production design in cinematic studies and training, and promoting the visibility and authorship of production design.

From a sociological and Cultural Studies perspective, the notion of authorship has grown more complex in relation to regimes of production and contemporary cultural labour. Hesmondhalgh & Baker (2011) analyse how working conditions in the cultural industry directly impact the possibilities for authorial expression. Creativity, in many cases, contends with hierarchical structures, precarious dynamics, and standardisation logics that constrain creators' agency. In this sense, authorship emerges not only as an aesthetic or symbolic issue but also as a political and labour-related one. Recent studies address authorship as a field of contention over credit, prestige, and labour rights (Banks, 2017). Thus, the question of who the author is cannot be disentangled from the material conditions of audiovisual production.

1.1. Authorship and the Visibility of Production Design in Spain

The significance of the art director's role has been consistently undervalued in academic literature throughout the history of cinema, not only in Spain but also internationally. The creation of AEDAA (Asociación Española de Dirección Artística Audiovisual) in 2023 arose from the need to unite efforts to advocate for the visibility of art department professionals in Spain, to serve shared interests, and to

establish associative foundations to lend prestige to a craft that has been disparaged (Barnwell, 2017). Article 3 of its statutes emphasises fostering the creative excellence of art direction and the advancement of sciences directly or indirectly related to this art, with the aim of enhancing the material and cultural value of audiovisual works, thereby valuing the art department. It is noteworthy that academic literature on production design has been enriched by contributions from professionals with extensive experience or sensitivity in the craft, such as Barnwell (2017), Ettegui (1999), Matellano (2008), Murcia (2002), Rizzo (2007), and Shorter (2012), among others.

In Spain, academic literature on the craft remains scarce. One of the pioneers is Gorostiza (1997), author of *Directores artísticos del cine español*, who published the book to “compensate for a systematic neglect of one of the professionals who has most contributed to the visual aspect (...) of films” (Gorostiza, 1997, p. 11). The lack of visibility for these professionals stems from several factors. One of the primary issues is the difficulty or terminological variety in referring to them. “In Spain, they were always called decorators” (Gorostiza, 1997, p. 11), though, according to Félix Murcia (2002), this terminological confusion is inherited from the historical evolution of art direction and the diverse knowledge an art director must possess, ranging from theatrical and operatic scenography to cinematic language, including art history, painting, and architecture, among others (Murcia, 2002, p. 21).

In recent decades, the need for digital creation skills has also emerged due to the incorporation of virtual sets and spaces. Iturbe Tolosa (2020), in a conversation with production designer Antxón Gómez, highlights that, despite increasing specialisation, the public visibility of art directors remains limited, and their role is frequently conflated with other positions. This confusion extends, moreover, to various fields of audiovisual communication where the art director’s figure appears, linked to advertising (Miguélez Juan, 2019). In recent years, academic research specifically addressing cinematic art direction from a pedagogical perspective has begun to emerge, such as Palomino’s (2023) doctoral thesis, which argues for the urgency of developing specialised training in art direction from a critical perspective, with the goal of granting the discipline the recognition and development it deserves in both academic and professional spheres.

The recent publication of *La Guía de roles. El Departamento de arte en las producciones audiovisuales*, developed by the AEDAA association (Collado et al., 2024), seeks to clarify that the head of the art department is the production designer/art director, at a time when major Spanish productions are beginning to credit the head of the art department as Production Designer in the credits.

For all these reasons, this manuscript proceeds from the premise that production design in Spain remains a craft with limited visibility, advocating for consultation with professionals to identify their concerns (Del Castillo Aira e Iturbe Tolosa, 2024), ascertain their perceptions, and assert their rights. From this standpoint, it proposes an empirical study aimed at deepening the understanding of the professional collective’s perceptions regarding authorship in art direction, its recognition within the audiovisual field, as well as working conditions, gender inequalities, and the proposals the sector itself puts forward to improve its situation.

1.2. Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study (PO) is to measure and interpret the perceptions of production design professionals in Spain regarding authorship within the audiovisual field, assessing their degree of recognition, professional visibility, and legitimacy as creative figures.

Building on this general objective, the following specific objectives (SO) are proposed: to delve into the working conditions, gender perspective, and professional challenges faced by the collective (SO1); to explore the level of visibility, recognition, and authorial credit received by art direction in audiovisual productions (SO2); and to gather and analyse proposals and demands expressed by professionals to enhance the creative and professional status of the art department (SO3).

2. Methodology

This study is framed within a methodological strategy that integrates qualitative and quantitative approaches, employing an exploratory-descriptive design aimed at understanding the perceptions, tensions, and claims surrounding authorship in the field of art direction within cinema and audiovisual production in Spain. A single methodological tool was chosen: a semi-structured questionnaire, specifically designed for this study—the first of its kind in this area in Spain. The questionnaire combines

closed-ended questions of a quantitative nature with open-ended questions oriented towards discursive analysis.

The target population comprises professionals from the art department in audiovisual productions with a significant presence in Spain. To access this population, a collaboration was established with the Asociación Española de Directores Artísticos del Audiovisual (AEDAA), through which the questionnaire was distributed to its members via email. The questionnaire was sent to the 68 active members of the association. A first dispatch occurred on 13 February 2025, followed by a reminder dispatch on 17 March 2025. Data collection concluded in mid-April, yielding a total of 54 valid responses, representing a response rate of 79.41%.

The resulting sample constitutes an intentional, non-probabilistic sample, comprising individuals with accredited professional experience in the specific field of art direction. This selection aligns with the objective of gathering information from an informed and situated position within the sector itself. The total number of responses obtained—54 participants—provides a robust operational base for analysis within the studied professional framework.

The unit of analysis corresponds to each completed questionnaire, considered as an individual and professional manifestation regarding the recognition—or lack thereof—of authorship in production design/art direction. The questionnaire consisted of 22 items distributed across five thematic blocks: (1) sociodemographic data and professional trajectory; (2) working conditions and situation; (3) composition of the art department and gender hierarchies; (4) perceptions of authorship, professional recognition, and visibility of the field; and (5) open comments and proposals. This structure enables the exploration of both objective variables and subjective dimensions, which is deemed essential in a study on authorship recognition.

The instrument was designed by the research team in collaboration with sector professionals. It was internally validated through a cross-review among team members, ensuring its conceptual appropriateness, the relevance of the language used in relation to the recipients' profile, and its alignment with the study's specific objectives. The validity of the instrument is supported both by its tailored design and its suitability to the context of use: having been distributed among active professionals in the sector, it guarantees the pertinence of the data obtained.

The procedure followed was as follows: after designing and agreeing upon the questionnaire's content, institutional support was sought from AEDAA for its distribution to all active members. The questionnaire was completed anonymously and voluntarily via an online form. The estimated response time ranged between 10 and 15 minutes.

Data analysis was conducted through two complementary approaches. On one hand, a quantitative analysis of the closed-ended questions was performed using descriptive statistics (percentages). On the other hand, the open-ended responses were qualitatively analysed through a thematic coding process. This coding was carried out manually, via an inductive reading that facilitated the identification of emergent categories based on the most recurrent and significant content (e.g., legal recognition, media visibility, precarity, cultural barriers, or training proposals). Subsequently, an internal triangulation procedure was applied through cross-review among researchers to ensure the reliability of the qualitative analysis. No specific software was used for the qualitative analysis, given the manageable volume of responses. The questionnaire was designed and disseminated using Google Forms. For the quantitative analysis of the closed-ended questions, Microsoft Excel was employed, with which the accompanying graphs were also generated.

The proposed method allows for the replicability of the study in other contexts or countries, particularly where similar professional associative structures exist. Likewise, the questionnaire's design, its internal validation, and its application within a professional associative framework provide assurances of rigour, relevance, and reliability for analysing a phenomenon as complex as authorship in cinematic professions.

3. Results

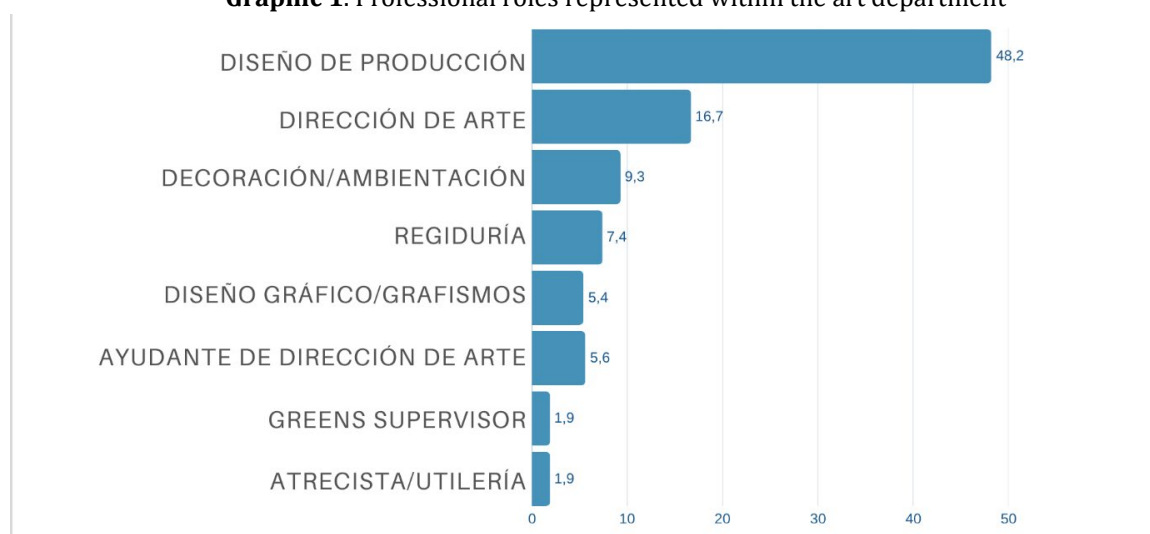
3.1. Sociodemographic Profile and Professional Trajectory

Prior to addressing the specific results related to authorship in production design/art direction, a general characterisation of the survey participants is presented below, with the aim of contextualising the data and assessing the representativeness and credibility of the findings.

The surveyed sample (n=54) exhibits a gender-balanced distribution: 50% of participants identify as men and 50% as women. Regarding the age variable, significant representation is observed in the intermediate and upper age ranges: 29.6% are aged between 35 and 44 years, 31.5% between 45 and 54 years, and 33.3% are 55 years or older. No responses were recorded in the 18 to 25 years age bracket, suggesting limited participation from young profiles or those at early career stages.

As shown in Figure 1, with respect to the professional role within the art department, production design stands out as the predominant function, accounting for 48.2%. This is followed by art direction (16.7%), decoration or set dressing (9.3%), assistant direction (7.4%), and support in art direction (5.6%). Less frequent profiles include graphic designer or title artist (5.7%), decoration assistant (3.8%), greens supervisor (1.9%), and props master or props coordinator (1.9%). This breadth of functions reflects the diversity of tasks and specialisations that constitute the art department in the cinematic field.

Graphic 1. Professional roles represented within the art department



Source: Author's own elaboration, 2025.

In relation to professional experience, 88.9% of the sample have accumulated more than ten years of trajectory in the sector, compared to 11.1% who have between five and ten years of experience. This data confirms that the majority of respondents possess a well-established professional background, which strengthens the credibility of the findings obtained in the research.

3.2. Employment Status and Working Conditions

Regarding the type of employment relationship, a vast majority of respondents (90.7%) state that they typically work under fixed-term project contracts, compared to 9.3% who operate as self-employed workers. This data reflects the strong temporality of the sector, consistent with the discontinuous nature of audiovisual production. Despite this, professional activity remains high: 98.1% of those surveyed have participated in at least one audiovisual work or production in the last 12 months.

Concerning the definition of duties, 57.4% report being occasionally asked to perform additional tasks beyond those agreed upon in their professional category; 18.5% indicate that this situation occurs frequently, and another 5.6% state that it happens always. In contrast, 18.5% assert that they have never undertaken duties outside what was stipulated. These figures highlight a common practice in the sector: due to insufficient staffing, a single professional often assumes multiple responsibilities that, under ideal conditions, would correspond to different specialised profiles.

The general perception of working conditions reveals significant nuances: 68.5% consider it to depend on each production, 14.8% describe them as precarious, and 16.7% as fair. This distribution suggests a heterogeneous reality, likely influenced by the nature of the project, the production company, or the available budget.

Regarding the average duration of the productions in which they work, 63% report participating in projects lasting more than twelve weeks, while 24.1% indicate between eight and twelve weeks. Short productions (less than four weeks) account for only 7.4%, and 1.9% state that they last between four

and eight weeks. Additionally, 3.8% opt for an open category (“other”), specifying that the duration varies depending on the type of production (film or series).

On the adequacy of the art department team to the real needs of each production, 46.3% consider it to be insufficient most of the time, while 44.4% believe it depends on the production. Only 9.3% assert that the team is almost always appropriately sized to the needs. These results underscore a widespread perception that art department teams typically have fewer personnel than required to adequately meet production demands.

Finally, with respect to the reconciliation of personal life and working hours, 72.2% report having frequently encountered problems, while 24.1% have experienced them occasionally. Only 3.7% state that they have never faced difficulties in this regard, indicating a widely shared issue within the sector.

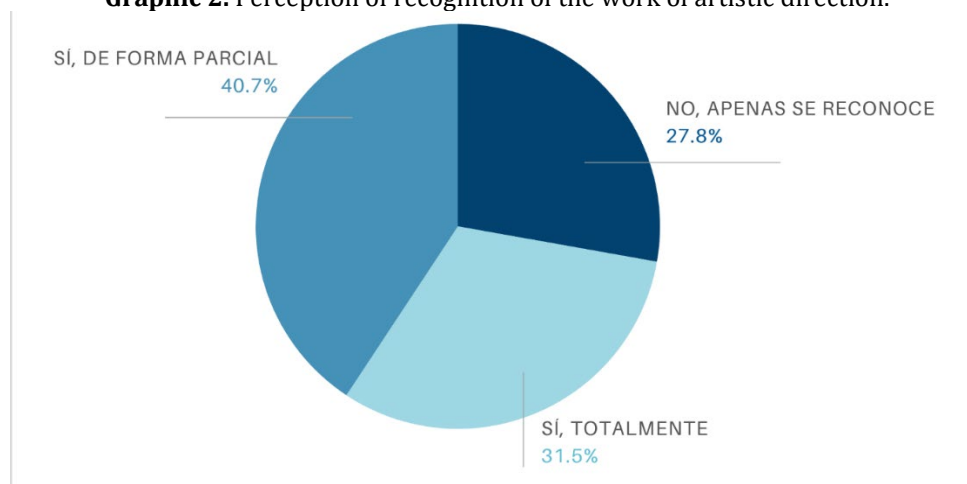
3.3. Gender Perspective in the Art Department

In relation to the gender composition of leadership positions within the art department, the results reveal a relatively balanced distribution based on the experiences of the surveyed individuals. A 37% indicate that in the productions they have worked on, leadership was predominantly male, while 33.3% state that it was predominantly female. Conversely, 29.6% report having worked in gender-balanced contexts. These figures suggest a certain plurality of configurations in leadership within the area, although still with a slight prevalence of male leadership.

3.4. Authorship and Recognition of the Art Department's Work

The degree of recognition perceived by art department professionals is uneven. When asked whether their contribution is reflected in the credits and in the general valuation of the work, as shown in Figure 2, only 31.5% respond affirmatively. The majority option, at 40.7%, indicates that recognition is partial, while 27.8% consider that their work is scarcely recognised. This distribution reveals a perception of limited visibility, even among those who acknowledge a certain level of valuation.

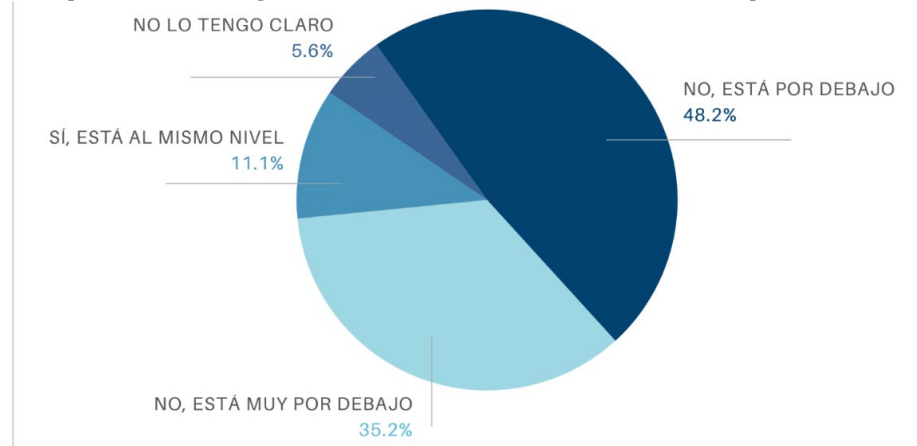
Graphic 2. Perception of recognition of the work of artistic direction.



Source: Author's own elaboration, 2025.

The comparison with other departments (direction, script, cinematography, music) amplifies this sense of imbalance: 48.1% believe that the art department receives less recognition, and 35.2% consider it to be significantly lower. Only 11.1% regard the recognition as being on the same level, while 5.6% express uncertainty. These figures, illustrated in Figure 3, reinforce the widespread perception that the work of art direction is valued to a lesser extent than that of other key departments, both at a professional level and in the reception of the work by the public and critics.

Graphic 3. Perception of the recognition of the work of artistic direction compared to other departments.



Source: Author's own elaboration, 2025.

Regarding the subjective experience of undervaluation, 51.9% report having felt it occasionally, 33.3% frequently, and 9.3% almost always. Only 5.6% state that they have never felt undervalued. This perception suggests a widespread situation of insufficient recognition, though not necessarily constant, pointing to a structural pattern rather than an isolated one.

The possibility of art direction being legally recognised as an authorship figure, on terms comparable to direction or cinematography, receives broad support: 79.6% of respondents answer yes, without doubt, while 13% support it with certain qualifications. Only 5.6% consider it unnecessary, and 1.9% disagree. This majority support underscores the need for an institutional reconsideration of the authorial status of the production design role.

3.5. The Issue of Authorship in Cinematography in Contrast to Production Design

The international landscape presents a fragmented picture. In countries with an Anglo-Saxon tradition, cinematographers typically cede their rights contractually to the producer; in France, they are neither recognised as authors nor granted economic rights; whereas in Germany, they are considered authors and receive royalties (McGowan, 2016). Within the European context, Directive 2019/790 grants member states the authority to determine which professional figures should be recognised as authors; countries such as Germany, Austria, Croatia, Estonia, Greece, and the Netherlands already include the DoP (Director of Photography) (Lattacher, 2021). In the United States, recognition is primarily moral—such as ASC awards or Oscars—because works are usually registered as work made for hire, with proprietary rights vesting in the production company. In all cases, production design remains far removed from these parameters.

The artistic responsibility of cinematography fully engages the question of authorship of the images that constitute a cinematic work. According to Duplá and Utray (2021), this claim is a constant among the professional collective, both in the Spanish context and in other European countries. Likewise, McGowan (2016, p. 19) had already noted that “their contribution, due to its technical nature, often fails to receive the recognition it deserves and, consequently, is believed to lack artistic and creative intent.”

The 2007 Film Law recognised cinematographers as part of the “creative personnel” and co-authors of the audiovisual work, a status called into question by the 2024 Film and Audiovisual Culture Law currently under consideration. In no instance has the figure of the art director been proposed for the category of author. This debate may have been influenced by the emergence of movements linked to realism following the Second World War, which favoured the filming of movies with natural sets and exteriors. The apparent ease of the art department’s work during these years fostered the perception that anyone could perform the task. Even in the few studies that demonstrate the importance of art directors’ contributions to the verisimilitude of a story as an element that “reinforces the notion of filmic authorship,” the final recognition is granted to the film’s director. For example, regarding the HBO series *Chernobyl* (Mazin, 2019), Blanco and Cruz-González state:

The *imitatio* that blurs the fine line separating real documentary imagery from recreated fiction (thanks, among other things, to its art direction) through its visual discourse (however...) we must not lose sight of the fact that this visual discourse we observe on screen is a piece that

reinforces the notion of the director's filmic authorship, by virtue of the famous pact of veridiction (Blanco and Cruz-González, 2022, p. 37)

Verisimilitude, or realism, is, on the other hand, one of the factors cited for the lack of recognition by the public. The absence of realism in favour of stylisation is the element highlighted in the work of Sigfrido Burmann, leading Silvia Blázquez and Mar Marcos to consider it a turning point in Spanish cinematography that enabled the systematisation of the profession: "He worked with the set itself, endowing it with artistic value and not representing reality as such, but suggesting it, creating an atmosphere (...) he gave a new dimension to lighting, which he used to attenuate the realism of the sets as much as possible" (Marcos Molano and Blázquez Nevado, 2021, p. 168).

This trend, however, may be shifting, as reflected in the study by Quintana-Servan et al. (2024), which compiles a total of 15 documents on the importance of the production design/art direction role. As a result of their study, conducted between 2019 and 2024, they conclude that "given that a narrative cannot develop without a visual aesthetic, its position is as important as that of a director, a producer, or a cinematographer. The execution and mastery of this profession determine the success of audiovisual productions" (Quintana-Servan et al., 2024, p. 61).

The surveyed professionals assert their creative aspect and total involvement in the visual, plastic, and aesthetic narrative of the film. Their performance is crucial in creating the "visual and symbolic universe" of a cinematic work, due to the responsibility assumed and executed in the conception and design of sets, decoration, and, in general, the atmosphere enveloping the narrative. The work of art direction profoundly impacts the way the story is perceived by the viewer, influencing how the public interprets the tone, era, and space of the narrative, which is essential for its emotional impact.

In summary, the Spanish case illustrates a situation of symbolic recognition without fully guaranteed legal protection. Cinematography enjoys cultural legitimacy and associative strength in contrast to the situation of production design professionals, but its status depends on a specific law still under consideration. This legal fragility foreshadows the challenges art direction faces in claiming equivalent recognition in cinematic works.

3.6. Why Are Art Department Professionals Authors?

The debate surrounding authorship is pertinent: "If the creator of the lighting is considered an author, why wouldn't the illuminated be so?" reflects one of the surveyed individuals. There is complete harmony among all responses that argue for the need to visibilise and recognise the co-authorship of their craft. "A good photograph (that is not merely of landscapes in natural locations) cannot be understood without good art direction (and vice versa)."

The surveyed individuals emphasise that the art department often begins its work much earlier than cinematography, meaning that many artistic decisions regarding spaces and production design are already made. "The aesthetic of an audiovisual piece is much more than its colour palette or depth of field. It requires a series of spatial and dramaturgical considerations that pertain to the entirety of a work," asserts a production designer. The results indicate that this is not about diminishing the prominence of others but about pursuing collaborative recognition: "Production design creates the visual aesthetic of the film, alongside the director and the cinematographer. The three form part of the authorship of an audiovisual piece," concludes one AEDAA member. "Direction and cinematography are not the same without art direction," adds another.

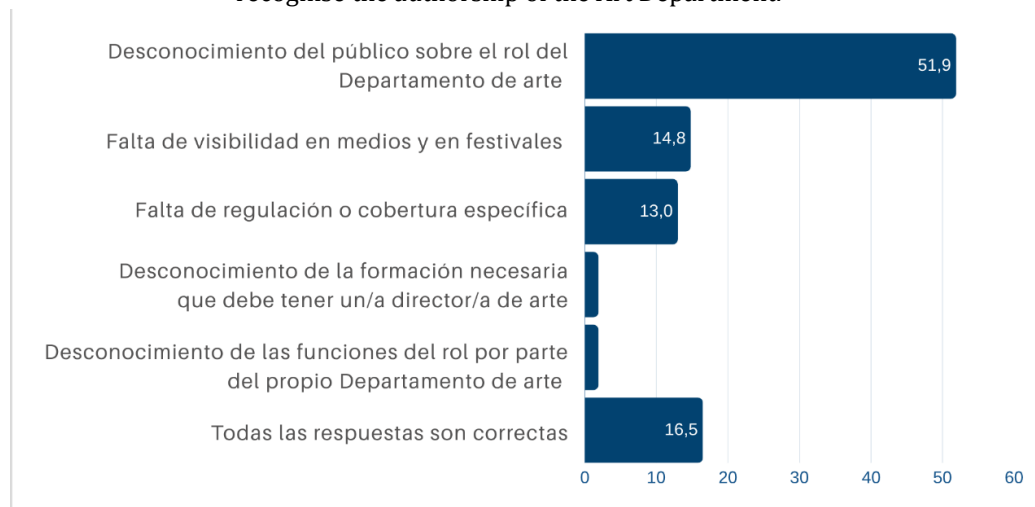
When asked about the weight of the art department in the visual identity of a work compared to cinematography, 22.2% maintain that they are on the same level, while 50% assert that, although they are, art direction is less socially recognised. An 11.1% consider art to have greater visual weight, as opposed to 9.3% who attribute it to cinematography, and 7.4% qualify that it depends on the type of production or direction. These results demonstrate a broad consensus on the relevance of art in constructing the visual identity, albeit with a still asymmetrical social perception.

3.7. Barriers

As can be observed in Figure 4, 51.9% of the surveyed individuals consider the greatest barrier they encounter to be the public's lack of awareness regarding the role of the art department. That is, it represents a barrier that extends beyond the industry-craft context. The second most selected option, with 14.8% of responses, relates to the lack of visibility in media and film festivals. It is worth noting

that 16.5% believe all responses are correct (including the option “lack of awareness of the training required for an art director”).

Graphic 4. Results on the barriers they encountered for the industry (production, legislation, public) to fully recognise the authorship of the Art Department.



Source: Author's own elaboration, 2025.

Regarding specific practices to enhance the visibility of the art department, half of the respondents (50%) affirm having participated in productions where this effort was satisfactory. However, 25.9% have never experienced this, and 16.7% indicate that, although the intention existed, it had no impact. The least frequent responses include participation in two productions (3.7%) and one response expressing incomprehension regarding the question (3.8%).

In this regard, they suggest increasing exhibitions, books, making-ofs, and general promotion, while also demanding more substantial legal actions: improved contracts and greater recognition in title credits (appearing immediately after the person responsible for cinematography and “not after editing, music...”). “Art directors are not technicians, we are authors, and if moral rights are recognised, the next step would be to recognise legal rights to place us on par with the director, screenwriter, and musician,” they assert. Lastly, there is also an industrial component: a valued action would be to award a prize for Best Production Design and, at the festival level, to value production design, not just script or cinematography. According to the respondents, it is necessary to achieve greater visibility (increased presence in the media and greater social weight).

4. Discussion and Conclusions

As a summary, it can be observed that the art direction community is a group with extensive professional experience, gender-balanced, predominantly in leadership roles, active, yet operating within a context of uncertainty, where they are consistently required to undertake more tasks than initially agreed (according to 80% of those surveyed), with limited teams and difficulties in reconciling personal life and work. They feel either poorly recognised or only partially acknowledged in the credits, and when compared to the cinematography department, they perceive a lesser degree of authorial recognition. This comparison with the cinematography department is not coincidental, as the Director of Photography (DoP) is recognised as a co-author (though they do not receive royalties from copyright), and there is an aspiration to follow in their footsteps. The lack of equivalence of their work with other roles traditionally considered artistic rather than merely technical (such as those of the director, screenwriter, or composer) is largely due to a limited social understanding of their creative role and an insufficient presence in channels of cultural legitimisation, such as the media or film festivals. Furthermore, it is essential to highlight that training and education represent another major challenge or issue for this discipline. Currently, the available training in art direction is scarce and entirely private.

In relation to the primary objective of this research—measuring and interpreting the perception of Spanish production design professionals regarding authorship—the results allow us to confirm a clear claim for this figure as a creative agent with authorial capacity. The responses collected demonstrate a demand for greater visibility, legal recognition of authorship, and a more robust projection of the craft within the professional and cultural spheres. Members of AEDAA (Asociación de Diseñadores Artísticos

Audiovisuales) call for greater professionalisation through improvements in craft training (which would also help mitigate its limited visibility in society), as well as a revaluation of the spaces, textures, and visual and plastic narratives they create, which often go unnoticed.

In relation to the specific objectives outlined, these have also been significantly fulfilled. The first—delving into the working conditions, gender perspective, and professional challenges faced by the collective—has been thoroughly addressed through the combined analysis of closed and open-ended questions, which has highlighted structural shortcomings, inequalities, and specific demands. The second objective—exploring the degree of visibility, recognition, and authorial credit received by art direction—has proven particularly significant, revealing a widespread perception of invisibility in credits, festivals, and media, as well as a constant comparison with the status of the cinematography department. Finally, the third objective—gathering and analysing proposals for improvement expressed by professionals—has resulted in a clear set of demands focused on professionalisation, regulated training, cultural impact, and authorial recognition, reaffirming the study's utility not only as a diagnostic tool but also as a roadmap for future actions and research lines.

These findings align with previous studies that warn of the limited visibility of the art department in academic and professional discourses. Likewise, the contrast with the Anglo-Saxon context—where collectives like the Production Designers Collective have succeeded in promoting authorial visibility—underscores the need for more robust institutional and guild structures in the Spanish context.

Recent milestones—such as the I National Congress of Production and Art Direction (2024, Madrid), the creation of international networks and associations like AEDAA, or the integration of craft professionals into academia—have fostered a qualitative shift, though still insufficient in terms of research, positioning, and structural and legal transformation.

Moreover, the survey highlights the urgency of deepening transfer and didactic efforts through constant exhibitions and presentations in schools, film festivals, and other entities interested in this type of artistic dissemination. Unlike the Anglo-Saxon trade union framework, Spanish production design professionals feel invisibilised compared to their DoP colleagues. Traditionally, directors and producers in Spain have placed excessive emphasis and burden on DoPs as the recognised authors who create a film's visual atmosphere according to current industry patterns. However, as many respondents note, DoPs lack plastic training to make decisions related to the aesthetic of the production. In this sense, the contrast with the Anglo-Saxon world is particularly striking. "In the United States, they give you your place to find the solutions the project needs from a production perspective (...) in Spain, we're far behind. We don't just choose a sofa, as many directors believe, since we develop and visualise the world in which the story is told and the characters live," asserts one respondent.

All this points to a systemic issue that requires institutional actions, public policies, and cultural interventions, as well as educational initiatives capable of fostering structural recognition. The inclusion of production design as a distinct area of knowledge in higher education, along with its integration into cultural and artistic decision-making spaces, emerges as a strategic demand.

In this regard, the relevance of establishing a research line focused on production design, which still holds little sway in Spanish academia, is emphasised. This article opens a pathway towards identifying audiovisual production roles that film analysis or cultural industry literature have overlooked, considering them mere workers in service of the director-author or the production company with its economic or strategic logics. Research into the functions of technical and artistic departments in audiovisual production is a promising field, not only due to its novelty but also for its applicability in improving working conditions. A 46.3% of those interviewed consider that the art department team did not meet the real needs of the production, and 81.5% have been required to perform extra tasks.

As future research lines, it is proposed to develop comparative studies between creative departments across different national industries, explore the perception of authorship in other departments and roles with creative and aesthetic weight (such as the costume department, editing, or post-production), and analyse the impact of professional recognition on the construction of career paths and authorial legitimacies. The adoption of interdisciplinary approaches, as well as the direct involvement of associative and academic networks, are essential to consolidate a more just and plural authorial shift in the analysis of contemporary audiovisual production.

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Associations:

- Asociación de Artistas plásticos escénicos y audiovisuales de España (AAPEE). <https://aapee.es/>
- Asociación Española de Dirección Artística Audiovisual (AEDAA). <https://aedaa.es/>
- Colectivo de Diseñadores de Producción. <https://www.productiondesignerscollective.org/>