

Artist careers.

Do you really expect to get paid?

An economic study of
professional artists in Australia

What's your other job?

A census analysis of arts
employment in Australia

Introduction

Over the past 30 years the number of professional artists working in Australia and recognition of their cultural, social and economic contribution to Australian society has grown. More and more people are participating in the arts and support from governments, business and individuals has also grown.

Sadly, this has not translated into higher incomes for Australia's artists, relative to other occupations.

As in many countries, the majority of Australian professional artists do not get huge financial rewards for pursuing their art practice. Rarely do people become professional artists for the money. They are driven by their passion and commitment to art.

In 1981, the Australia Council for the Arts established an inquiry into individual artists in Australia. The inquiry initiated research to determine the number of professional artists, their career patterns and income. This work was then unique in Australia, and the information and recommendations helped shape government policy and improve the understanding of culture and the arts in this country.

Since then, the Australia Council has commissioned four further studies, in 1983, 1987, 1993 and 2002. All were conducted by Professor David Throsby and looked at the earned incomes of Australia's practicing professional artists.

Over the past 30 years, parallel with this research, governments have implemented strategies and programs which have:

- increased opportunities for artistic practice and careers
- increased audiences for and participation in the arts
- ensured artists' incomes have held their ground.

Artists careers summary

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In 2009/10, the Australia Council undertook two further research projects that built on this earlier work. These projects are:

Do you really expect to get paid? An economic study of professional artists in Australia ('the artist survey'). This study was commissioned by the Australia Council but conducted and written independently by Professor David Throsby and Anita Zednik from Macquarie University.

What's your other job? A census analysis of arts employment in Australia ('the census study') analyses data from the past three Australian Population Censuses (1996, 2001 and 2006) in relation to artists' employment and income. It was undertaken by the Centre for Creative Industries and Innovation at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) under the leadership of Professor Stuart Cunningham.

These studies reveal that one third of artists put their artistic skills to use in other industries, whether they're novelists who are also editors, actors who run corporate training, visual artists who design websites, or dancers who are also Pilates instructors. This is a very clear example of how the arts contribute to society and how creative talents nurtured through artistic practice are being used to build cultural industries and enhance communities and business.

It is, however, an important priority for the Australia Council to build the sustainability of an artist's chosen career.

IN THE PAST FEW YEARS THE COUNCIL HAS INVESTED IN:

- more grants to artists by internal administrative efficiencies
- new programs to support young and emerging artists
- residencies and fellowships for artists
- market development domestically and internationally
- Artsupport Australia (philanthropy for the arts)
- studies in collaboration with the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts
- initiatives to support the development of new work between major performing arts organisations and smaller organisations
- research collaborations with the Australian Business Arts Foundation (AbaF) to increase business support for the arts.



'... I'm still very much at early stages of career development. I'm still finding my voice and place within the vast arena of contemporary jewellery.'

Natalia Milosz-Piekarska
Melbourne, Victoria
Jeweller.

IN THE FUTURE, THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL WILL:

- increase information to artists about available career pathways to transition
- provide interactive career models through a website portal
- engage industry sectors in supporting work opportunities for artists
- continue to develop and implement strategies for business development in the sector
- increase philanthropic support to individual artists
- explore reforms in tax and social security arrangements to support artists.

THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL IS ALSO HAVING AN IMPACT ON ARTIST CAREERS WITH ITS COMMITMENT TO GROW DEMAND FOR THE ARTS AND INCREASE AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION AND ACCESS THROUGH:

- strategies to develop national and international touring
- engaging audiences through digital platforms supported by research to develop a better understanding of how audiences are interacting through these platforms
- expanding the scope of participatory activities for audiences
- increasing programming activities that reflect Australia's culturally-diverse identity.

The Australia Council acknowledges the invaluable work of both Professor David Throsby and Professor Stuart Cunningham and their respective teams in delivering this comprehensive update on our working artists. It is an invaluable tool for all of us who care for and advocate for the wellbeing of the arts in Australia; the foundations of which are our individual artists.

Kathy Keele
Chief Executive Officer
Australia Council for the Arts

'Even if you have a publishing deal that pays you in instalments like mine did, well, unless you're independently wealthy, you basically have to have a paying job elsewhere.'

Maggie Joel
Sydney, New South Wales
Author, Federal Government
public servant.



A. How did we get the numbers?

These two studies take different approaches to gathering information about Australian artists' employment and income.

The census study asks, 'What was the "main job" undertaken in the week prior to the Australian Population Census?'

The artist survey involved approximately 1,000 professional artists whose arts practice may, or may not be, their main source of income.

How do we know who is a professional artist?

The artist survey draws its sample of professional artists from a range of sources including membership of professional arts associations. Artists sampled are subject to a set of screening questions to establish whether or not they meet accepted standards of professionalism in their artform. Those included in the sample also needed to be practicing artists, actively pursuing their art, irrespective of the sources of their overall income.

The data gathered by these two studies complement each other, but are not directly comparable.

A BIT MORE ABOUT THE CENSUS STUDY

The Australian Population Census is a survey of the entire Australian population. Since the measurement is only of the main job in the week before the census – and it is well-known that most artists earn the majority of their income from other sources – the census only captures some of Australia's practising artists.

The approach used in the census study does provide new insights into arts employment. However, the analysis differs in three ways:

- 1. It focuses on the arts rather than on culture**
The data reflects a more narrowly-defined sector than the cultural sector, which has been the main focus of census data previously published. It does not include, for example, employment in commercial photography, film or journalism. Because these groups are relatively large in number, their previous inclusion in data has concealed key characteristics of arts employment.
- 2. It combines the census occupations and industry codes**
The approach merges data on occupations with data on industries. This methodology, previously applied to employment in the cultural and creative industries, has now been applied to the arts.
- 3. It provides greater understanding of where and how artists are employed**
This study gives a more accurate picture of total employment in the arts, as measured in the census.



'We have been working away solidly on our product for more than five years now with the result that people are now starting to seek us out. We appeared at our first interstate arts festival last year and have since been contacted by other festivals.'

Glen Murray
Hobart, Tasmania
Box office supervisor at Theatre Royal
and box office casual at the Tasmanian
Symphony Orchestra.

B. How many artists are there?

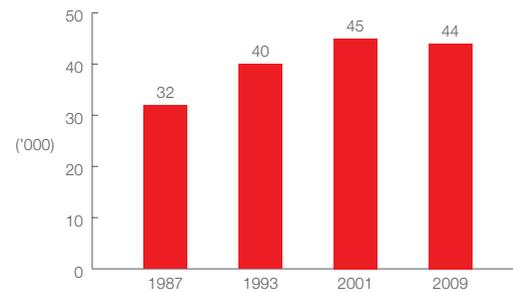
Taken together, these two studies give us a good picture of how many Australians earn their incomes from art-making.

The census study shows that in 2006, 24,000 Australians were employed in artist occupations.

The total population of practising professional artists in 2009 was estimated at just over 44,000.

The growth in the numbers of practising professional artists has levelled out over the past 10 years. However, there are nearly 40 percent more artists in Australia than there were 20 years ago.

Trends in numbers of practising professional artists



Source: Artist survey

'I teach half a day a week, enough to keep my hand in ... I love teaching but I don't want to become too (institutionalised).'

Leslie Rice
Sydney, New South Wales
Artist/painter/tattooist. Small business owner and part-time teacher at the National Art School.



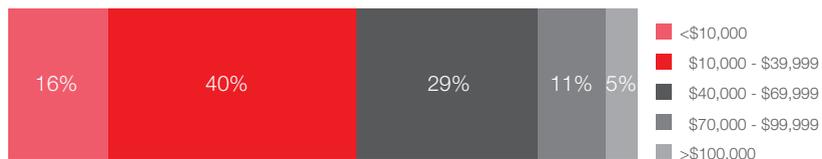
C. How much do Australian artists earn?

The median total income for professional artists in 2007/08 was \$35,900 (artist survey).

Since most artists earn low incomes and very few earn high ones, the income statistics concentrate on median income. This is the half-way point; half earn above the median and half earn below. An artist's total income tells us how much they earned from their artwork, combined with other employment. Their creative income tells us how much they earned from their artistic practice.

Just over two-thirds of artists earned between \$10,000 and \$69,999 in total in 2007/08. However, most were towards the lower end of this range. Sixteen percent of artists earned less than \$10,000, while five percent earned more than \$100,000.

Total artist income 2007 - 2008



Source: Artist survey

HOW DO DIFFERENT ARTFORMS FARE?

Overall, artists' incomes have not changed dramatically over the six year period leading up to 2007/08.

However, some creative practices, such as writers and dancers, have been impacted more than others since the last survey in 2001.

Australia's visual artists and dancers have the lowest median total income (artist survey).

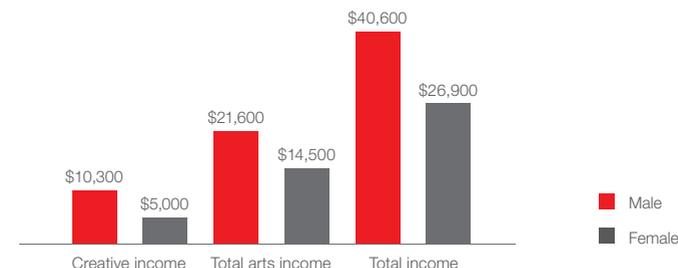
Community cultural development workers have the highest median income and, after actors, have the second highest 'creative income' (artist survey).

Composers and craft practitioners have also shown improvement in their total and creative incomes since 2001 (artist survey).

MEN VS. WOMEN

Female artists earn less from their creative practice than male artists (artist survey). The median creative income of male artists in 2007/08 was \$10,300, compared with \$5,000 for female artists.

Median income comparison



Source: Artist survey

Just over half of all artists who live with a partner (52 percent) say their spouse's income is important in supporting their artistic practice (artist survey).

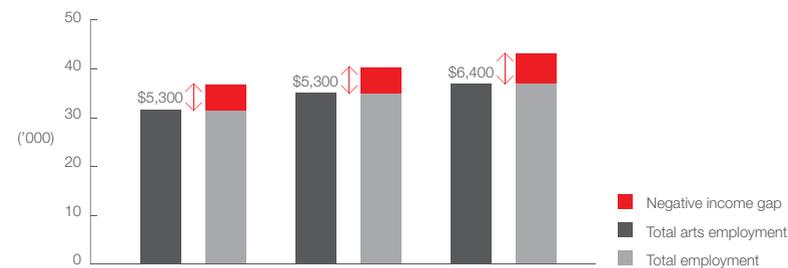
REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

Artists living in capital cities earn 22 percent more than those in regional cities (artist survey).

ARTISTS AND OTHER INDUSTRIES

There is a negative income gap between professional artists working in the arts sector and the general workforce. The census study shows this gap in real income widened between 2001 and 2006.

Trends in average total income



Source: Census study

'I enjoy the balance between working in the warehouse and making art. The warehouse and driving the delivery van give me the headspace to come up with ideas for projects and problem solve projects I'm working on at the time. If I only made art I think I would burn out very quickly.'

**Matthew Kneale
Melbourne, Victoria
Performance project director,
warehouse manager.**



'Work at your art form. Work as hard as you can. Become obsessed. Never give up and work the way that works best for you.'

**Jon Doust
Albany, Western Australia
Author, MBTI® practitioner, facilitator,
Master of Ceremonies, professional
speaker and community activist.**

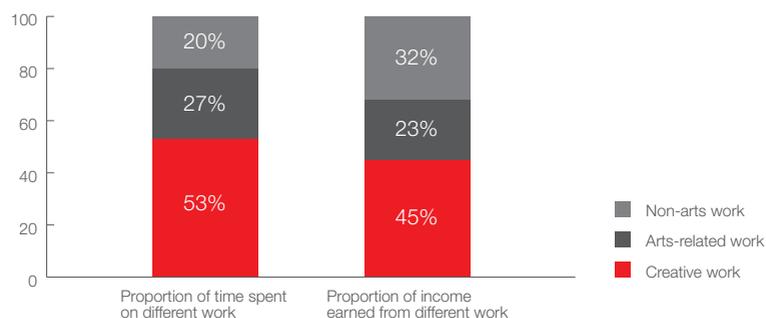
D. How do artists earn their income?

The artist survey shows Australian artists spend more than half of their time working on creative projects, just over a quarter on arts-related work such as teaching in their artform, and one fifth of their time on non-arts work.

On average, their creative projects earn them only 45 percent of their total income. The principal source of creative income is through salary and wages (64 percent) and through sales and royalties (27 per cent - artist survey).

The artist survey also shows that the 20 percent of their time devoted to non-arts work earns them nearly one-third of their total income.

Average time spent on and income earned from different work activities



Just over half (55 percent) of practising professional artists are able to spend all of their working time at some sort of arts work – including creative work and arts-related work (artist survey).

ONE THIRD OF ARTISTS NOW APPLY THEIR SKILLS IN OTHER INDUSTRIES

The context of artistic practice is changing. In this new environment, artists are more aware of the creative and income-earning potential of using their skills more broadly.

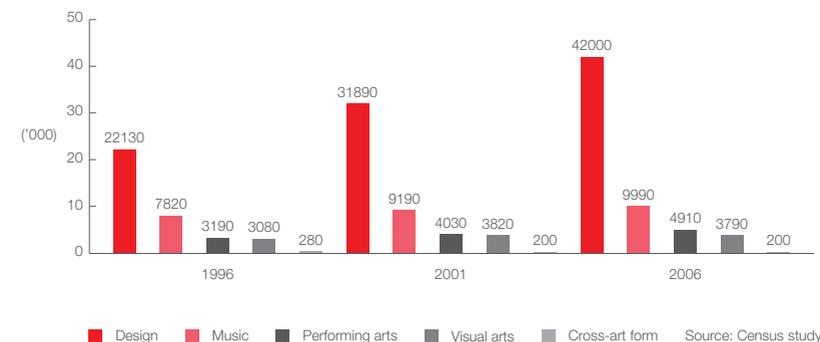
The census study shows that between 2001 and 2006, the number of people employed in artist occupations decreased, while the number of people employed in arts-related occupations increased. This increase is particularly strong in design, where the number of people employed has nearly doubled in the past 10 years.

Selected arts-related occupations

Design	Music	Performing arts	Cross-art form	Visual arts
Illustrator	Piano teacher	Drama teacher (private)	Artistic director	Picture framer
Graphic designer	Music director	Dance teacher (private)		Art teacher (private)
Designers and illustrators	Music teacher (private)			
Interior designer				
Fashion designer				

Source: Census study

Trends in employment in arts-related occupations



Source: Census study

In 2006, some 61,000 people were employed in arts-related occupations. Nearly two-thirds of these were in industries outside the arts.

The artist survey found that 36 percent of artists use their artistic skill in industries outside the arts, while the census study shows that 51 percent worked outside the arts.

In the census study, half the artist occupations were found outside the arts sector, such as a singer working in the hospitality sector, or a visual artist working as a designer in manufacturing.

Both studies agree that writers are the most likely to work outside the arts sector.

UNEMPLOYMENT

The artist survey shows that just over a quarter of Australian artists experienced a period of unemployment between 2004 and 2009. Between 1996 and 2001, a third of artists had experienced unemployment.

E. What kind of skills do Australia's professional artists have?

Australia's professional artists are, on average, highly educated, with 65 percent of them holding a tertiary qualification, compared to 25 percent in the workforce at large.

Writers and visual artists have the highest proportion of practitioners with a postgraduate diploma or degree (45 and 42 percent respectively - artist survey).

Most artists have an average of four years of formal training (artist survey).

Learning on the job is also important for artists. Twenty five percent of writers, 30 percent of actors and 31 percent of community cultural development workers say this is their most important form of training (artist survey).

RECOGNITION

Forty percent of Australian artists have had their work seen overseas.

Craft practitioners and composers have the highest proportion of interstate and overseas engagements (artist survey).

'My advice is: always have a plan B. That's what I say to my students. Always know that there is something you can fall back on. I think its great to go out there and try whatever it is that you aspire to... but always have a plan B.'

Verna Lee
Sydney, New South Wales
Harpist, music teacher, mother.



F. Who are Australia's artists?

AGE

Both studies show that artists tend to be older than the general workforce. The median age of artists is around 47 years (artist survey). Twenty percent of people working in artist occupations are 55 and over, compared to 15 percent of the working population (artist survey). Those employed in arts-related occupations were usually aged between 25 and 34 years of age (census study).

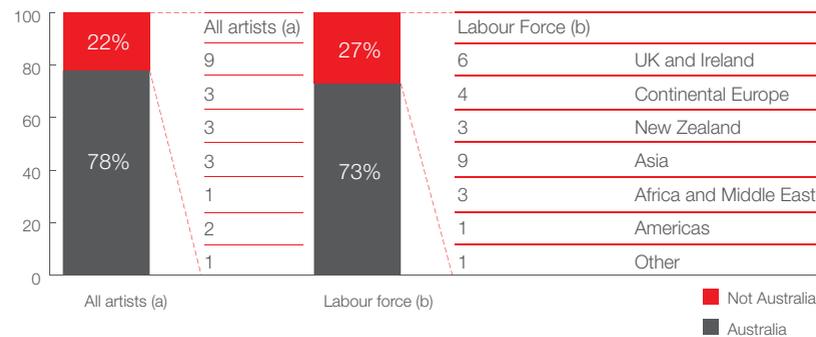
GENDER

Writers, visual artists, craft practitioners, dancers and community cultural development workers are significantly more likely to be female; while actors, musicians and composers are more likely to be male (artist survey). But arts-related occupations in the performing arts are mostly dominated by women, at 71 percent (census study).

CULTURAL BACKGROUND

More than three-quarters of professional artists are born in Australia, consistent with the Australian labour force (artist survey). Artists born in Asia or Africa and the Middle East comprise four percent of all artists, compared with 12 percent of the labour force (artist survey).

Birthplace of Australian artists and labour force comparison



(a) Numbers for all artists are weighted to represent Australia's artist population.

(b) Australian Bureau of Statistics (2009) 6291.0 55.001-Labour Force, Australia, Detailed Electronic Delivery, Dec 2009, LM6 Oct09.

Most artists who come from a culturally and linguistically-diverse background report that it has a positive impact on their arts practice (artist survey).

DISABILITY

The artist survey found that around eight percent of professional artists have a physical or intellectual disability. One in five artists with a disability says this is currently the biggest factor holding back their career (artist survey).



'Blindness. That has got to be considered a pretty big hurdle. In Australia two-thirds of blind people are unemployed. To have worked in the system a bit, to have run a business, I feel privileged. I shouldn't feel privileged, because it should be my right to do all of that.'

Tony Doyle
Adelaide, South Australia
Creative producer, disability arts.

G. What are the issues facing artists?

MANY ARTISTS NEED BETTER BUSINESS SKILLS

Freelance artists need a certain level of business acumen to organise and keep track of work-related issues. Half of these artists believe their business skills to be good or excellent. More than one-third of artists describe their skills as only adequate and a further 14 percent as inadequate (artist survey).

TIME AND OPPORTUNITY POOR

Artists see a lack of time to do creative work, lack of work opportunities and lack of financial return from their creative work as the most important factors inhibiting their careers, both at the present time and throughout their careers. However, artists also say that it is passion and persistence that advances their careers.

FINANCIAL SECURITY

Arts occupations have a higher percentage of workers in part-time employment (44 percent) than the workforce as a whole (32 percent - census study).

The proportion of artists having no arrangements for future financial security, such as superannuation, has decreased from 54 percent to 14 percent over the past 20 years (artist survey).

Despite their difficult financial situation, the majority of artists do not apply for financial assistance, such as grants, prizes and fellowships. The artist survey shows 45 percent of professional artists applied for assistance in the past five years. Overall, 29 percent of artists were successful in receiving a grant.

In the previous survey (2001), only 25 percent of all artists received assistance.

THERE ARE OPPORTUNITIES WITH NEW TECHNOLOGY

Sixty percent of all artists believe new technologies are likely, or very likely, to improve their income. The artist survey shows internet usage is high amongst artists, with 67 percent using the internet to research matters relating to creative practice and 30 percent using it to promote their work (artist survey).

The most common opportunities artists cite arising from new technologies are reaching a wider audience and promoting their work (26 percent) as well as networking, collaboration and communication with other artists (20 percent). Other opportunities include improving the creative process and working in new technology-led artforms. One third of visual artists use image manipulation software extensively in their creative process (artist survey).

'If you want to sell your work, or apply for grants and funding, you have to understand the administration and business procedures used in the art world.'

Chris Dodds
Kew East, Victoria
Designer, producer, business manager.



Commentary and international comparisons

Taken together, the two surveys build a strong picture of the employment characteristics of artists in Australia. The picture they paint, however, reinforces the now substantial body of academic and policy literature from around the world on the working lives of artists. Some of the main findings of this body of literature are:

- Compared to similar occupational groups, artist occupations tend to have higher rates of unemployment and underemployment, lower incomes, greater variability in incomes and higher rates of self-employment.
- Formal education plays a lesser role in artists' earnings than it does for other occupations; experience and reputation are critical in the career development and earnings of artists.
- Artists' work is often contingent; it is contract-based, intermittent and unpredictable.
- Artists' work involves high hidden costs, including unremunerated research and development costs.

As a result of these characteristics, the work of artists is associated with high levels of uncertainty and difficulties in professional development. In response, artists tend to adopt 'portfolio' careers, undertaking a variety of remunerated activities in both arts and non-arts related areas in order to spread the income risk, which is part of contingent employment.

Researchers have expressed surprise that the number of artists has continued to grow over the past 20 to 30 years or, at the least, remained steady. This is despite their low and declining relative incomes.

The labour market of artists is unlike any other in that many participants do not leave it in pursuit of other careers and greater financial reward. One explanation is the 'psychic income' argument; that artists are motivated by an inner drive and seek other non-monetary rewards. Certainly, many in the artist survey nominated persistence and passion as the most important factors advancing their careers.

Another popular explanation is the 'winner takes all' argument; that the arts labour market acts like a lottery with many artists attracted to the high earnings of a few 'stars' and overestimating their likely earnings.

Research undertaken in Europe, North America and the Asia-Pacific region, including Australia, provides overwhelming evidence that artists' working lives and their labour markets are similar around the world.

Dr Nick Herd
Director of Research and Strategic Analysis

'I do have my creative freedom so I can write and I can do what I like. But I do feel like I am being held back a little bit because I don't have a lot of money to spend on getting myself out there.'

Leah Flanagan
Darwin, Northern Territory
Singer, songwriter, retail assistant and
Tourism Hub Operator for Aboriginal
Bush Traders.



Want to find out more?

Part of the Australia Council's role in supporting the arts is to generate research that creates value for the arts sector, adds new knowledge to the field and provides insights and direction for policy, practice and innovation.

Visit our Research Hub to find out more.

www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research

Or contact: Dr Nick Herd

Director of Research and Strategic Analysis.

Email: n.herd@australiacouncil.gov.au

About the portraits

Emerging Australian photographer Fiona Wolf travelled around Australia to meet and photograph the artists featured in this report. Fiona has experienced the ups and downs of establishing a career as an artist. While dedicating herself '100 percent' to her business www.wolfwerk.net, she supplements her income by assisting other photographers, shooting commercial work and helping students involved in workshops at the Australian Centre for Photography in Sydney.

The Australia Council would like to thank the artists involved in this project: Chris Dodds, Jon Doust, Tony Doyle, Leah Flannagan, Maggie Joel, Matthew Kneale, Verna Lee, Natalia Milosz-Piekarska, Glen Murray and Leslie Rice.