

## CHAPTER 2

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### Defining the artist population

#### **General problems in defining the artist population**

Estimating the size and composition of the population of practising professional artists—the subjects of this study—is particularly difficult. Standard sources of population size estimates for occupational categories, such as census data, suffer from a number of problems when applied to artists. Firstly, the allocation of an individual respondent to a job category in the population census is based on his or her ‘main job’ in the week that the census is taken. It is understood that this procedure will overlook many artists who take other work as a means of supporting their artistic practice, and who are therefore working at some other ‘main job’ at the time of the data collection.

Secondly, categorising artists in such statistical collections does not distinguish the professional from the amateur. While it is reasonable to assume professional status belongs to anyone who declares their ‘main job’ as artist, there is no way of knowing if such individuals meet more refined criteria for professionalism, such as those used in this study. Thirdly, there may be problems in understanding what ‘artist’ means as a job category, when the data collection is based on self-evaluation. This problem is reduced, though not eliminated, as the level of detail of job classification in the census is refined. As was the case in the most recent Australian population census, the specification of job classifications in the arts is now greatly improved over what it was in earlier years. Nevertheless, these data still contain disturbingly large numbers in the ‘not elsewhere classified’ or similar categories for some artistic occupations.

For this survey, we have adopted the same approach used for the earlier studies in this series, namely compiling lists of artists in different artforms from source lists provided by various arts service organisations, arts companies, directories, membership lists for unions and professional associations. A full account of the compilation of these lists is provided in Appendix II. The gathering of these lists for the present survey was considerably more difficult than in previous years, for two reasons. First, new privacy laws have been introduced in Australia which restrict the extent to which organisations can disclose details such as names and addresses of members or customers to a third party. As a result some arts organisations were unable to provide us with lists that would have added to our coverage.

Fortunately, for most organisations, our guarantee of confidentiality and the academic nature of the research were sufficiently compelling to allow us to access their data. Even so, the privacy problem inevitably led to some gaps in our final consolidated listings. Second, some unions and professional organisations in the arts have suffered from declining membership; in some areas it is no longer necessary to be a union member in order to obtain a professional engagement. Hence their membership lists, where available, are no longer as comprehensive as they used to be.

Despite these problems, it was possible to compile substantial lists of artists in each artform. The lists served two purposes in the context of this survey. First, they enabled an estimate to be made of the aggregate size of the population of practising professional artists within each PAO and in total. Second, they provided the sample frame from which it was possible to select, at random, sufficient names to make up a statistically valid sample for that population. Given that the population lists are sufficiently large and comprehensive, and given that our samples have been properly drawn, we are justified in assuming that the characteristics of those artists not included in the lists will be broadly similar to those on the lists. Hence, the data derived from the survey can be used, according to appropriate statistical procedures, for valid inference to the population of artists as a whole.

Once the population size estimates have been reached for each occupational category, they can be rationalised and checked for consistency with corresponding occupational numbers derived from the most recent Australian census, under certain assumptions. In the following sections we tabulate our population estimates in total, and by state, and then compare these estimates with the corresponding census data. Finally, we look at trends in the numbers of practising professional artists over the last 15 years as revealed by our series of surveys.

## Population estimates

Given some uncertainties in the coverage of the data, it is appropriate to estimate population sizes for each PAO as a range, in the first instance. Table 1 shows the estimated numbers of practising professional artists in Australia as defined in our survey, indicated first as a range and then as the mid-point of the range, this being the best point estimate able to be made. In broad terms, according to our estimates, the number of practising professional artists in Australia is 40,000-50,000, with a reasonable expectation that the actual number is around 45,000. The largest single group is musicians, with more than 12,000, and the smallest is dancers, with 1000-1500 practitioners.

**Table 1 Estimated numbers of practising professional artists in Australia, 2001**

	Range		Mid-point
	From ('000)	To ('000)	('000)
Writers	7.0	7.5	7.25
Visual artists	8.5	10.0	9.25
Craft practitioners	4.0	4.5	4.25
Actors	6.0	7.0	6.5
Dancers	1.0	1.5	1.25
Musicians	12.0	13.0	12.5
Composers	1.0	2.0	1.5
Community cultural development workers	2.0	3.0	2.5
<b>All artists</b>	<b>41.5</b>	<b>48.5</b>	<b>45.0</b>

Because of gaps in the coverage of our population lists, as noted above, data cannot be reliably used to estimate the state by state distribution of artists. However, the 2001 population census data can be used, under certain assumptions, to provide a breakdown of 'main job' artists by state or territory. If we can assume that the geographic distribution of practising professional artists is the same as that for 'main job' artists (and that assumption appears reasonable), we can apply the state by state proportions from the census to our aggregate population figures to obtain an estimated state and territory distribution of practising professionals. These results are shown in Table 2. It appears that the proportions of artists in both New South Wales and Victoria are slightly greater than the corresponding proportions of the overall Australian population in these two states, but the differences are not great. Broadly speaking we can say that artists are distributed among the states and territories in much the same way as the rest of the population.

**Table 2 Estimated numbers of practising professional artists by state and territory, 2001**

State/territory	Practising professional artists (a)	Percentage distribution	
	('000)	Artists %	Australian population (b) %
New South Wales	16.2	36.2	33.8
Victoria	11.8	26.5	24.8
Queensland	7.8	17.3	18.5
South Australia	3.0	6.6	7.9
Western Australia	3.8	8.4	9.8
Tasmania	1.0	2.2	2.5
Northern Territory	0.5	1.0	1.0
Australian Capital Territory	0.9	1.9	1.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>45.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

(a) For method of estimation of state/territory distribution, see text. (b) Source of Australian population data: ABS *Yearbook 2002*.

The population census data can also be used to indicate the approximate distribution of 'main job' artists within particular artforms between states. Calculations based on these data suggest, for example, that there are a concentration of actors, composers and writers in New South Wales; of writers in Victoria; of dancers in Queensland and Western Australia; and of craft practitioners in Tasmania, Western Australia and South Australia. Similarly, there appear to be proportionately more craft practitioners and visual artists in the Northern Territory than in the other states, and more writers in the Australian Capital Territory. However, it should be noted that all of these differences are small.

### Reconciliation of survey and census data

As noted earlier in this chapter, it is possible to check the overall population estimates from this survey against census data under certain assumptions. Specifically, Table 3 shows estimates of persons whose 'main job' was artist in the week of the 2001 population census, compared with the number of practising professional artists estimated from our own population lists. The estimates are compiled by matching PAOs with the following census job categories:

- Writer–author, book editor, script editor
- Visual artist–painter, sculptor, illustrator
- Craft practitioner–potter/ceramic artist
- Actor–actor, director (film/TV/radio/stage)
- Dancer–dancer/choreographer
- Musician–instrumental musician, singer, music director
- Composer–composer.

The estimates do not include the 'not elsewhere classified' or 'not further defined' categories for visual artists and craft practitioners, or for actors and dancers because of difficulties in allocating them to the specific occupations.

Table 3 shows that in all cases except dancers the estimated number of practising professionals, which includes part-timers, exceeds the census figure. The two estimates might be reconciled if it can be assumed that those practising professionals who spent more than 50 per cent of their time at arts work in the year in question might also have been picked up in the census.

To investigate this question, we can make use of a distinction in our survey data between 'creative work at PAO' (pursuing the immediate creative practice) and 'all arts work' (including other work in the arts such as teaching or administration), and calculate the implied numbers of artists working more than 50 per cent of their time in these two ways. These two figures could be thought of as establishing lower and upper bounds respectively on the numbers of practising professional artists that might also appear in the census. The last two columns in Table 3 indicate this range for each of the occupations. It is seen that the

census estimate falls within the range for all artists and for the majority of specific occupations. The explanation of the discrepancy in the case of craft practitioners is that the census figure relates only to potters and ceramic artists; if other modes of practice were included, the census figure would more than double and would then lie within the required range. In the case of composers, it may be that for census purposes some composers described their 'main job' as musician.

Overall the comparisons confirm that in broad terms our estimates of the artist population are consistent with census data.

**Table 3 Reconciliation of census data with survey population estimates**

	Estimated number whose 'main job' is artist in 2001 census (a) ('000)	Estimated number of practising professional artists ('000)	Number of practising professional artists working more than 50% of time at:	
			Creative work in PAO ('000)	All arts work ('000)
Writers	4.0	7.3	3.7	5.6
Visual artists	5.0	9.3	4.8	7.8
Craft practitioners	1.5	4.3	2.5	3.6
Actors	3.6	6.5	3.0	4.8
Dancers	1.4	1.3	1.1	1.2
Musicians	8.4	12.5	6.5	10.0
Composers	0.3	1.5	0.8	1.3
<b>All artists</b>	<b>24.1</b>	<b>45.0 (b)</b>	<b>22.7 (b)</b>	<b>36.5 (b)</b>

(a) For method of estimation, see text.

(b) Includes community cultural development workers.

## Trends in artist numbers

Finally, what can we say about trends in the numbers of practising professional artists in Australia over the past 15 years?

Table 4 shows population numbers drawn from the 1987 and 1993 surveys compared with estimates from this study. We observe that total numbers of artists have grown steadily over the last 15 years, with the largest increases among writers, visual artists and actors. The numbers of craft practitioners and musicians have fluctuated around a fairly static long-term trend line, although numbers in the crafts have declined in more recent years.

In addition, growth rates in the period 1993-2001 from our own estimates can be combined with growth rates for 'main job' artists between the 1996 and 2001 population censuses. From this, we derive approximate average annual compound growth rates in artist numbers over the last 5-10 years. These calculations suggest an annual growth in the number of artists of around 2-3 per cent per annum. However, there appear to be some significant variations in growth rates between artistic occupations.

Actors and composers show annual increases of around 5-7 per cent. The numbers of visual artists and writers show moderate growth of around 2-4 per cent, whereas musician numbers have grown somewhat more slowly at around 1-3 per cent. Changes in the numbers of dancers are more difficult to interpret; our estimates of practising professionals have remained reasonably static, whereas the numbers of 'main job' dancers and choreographers in the census have risen more than 5 per cent per year. The only occupation to show a decline since the early 1990s is craft practitioners, where numbers appear to have fallen at a rate of somewhere between 2-5 per cent per year.

**Table 4 Trends in numbers of practising professional artists, 1987–2001**

	1987 (’000)	1993 (’000)	2001 (’000)
Writers	3.2	6.0	7.3
Visual artists	6.2	7.5	9.3
Craft practitioners	4.4	5.5	4.3
Actors		4.2	6.5
Dancers	3.4	1.3	1.3
Musicians		11.5	12.5
Composers	13.7	1.0	1.5
Community cultural development workers	1.1	3.0	2.5
<b>All artists</b>	<b>32.0</b>	<b>40.0</b>	<b>45.0</b>