

CHAPTER 4

The diversity of artistic practice

Artists rarely practise in only one specific artistic occupation for a lifetime. Most artists express themselves across a range of different occupations within a single artform area, such as the writer who has been a novelist, poet and screenwriter at different points in her career. Some artists work across several different artforms, for example actors and dancers who also take singing roles from time to time. This chapter looks at the diversity of artistic practice in terms of the occupations and artforms undertaken during an artist's career, and in terms of artists' creative achievements.

The range of artistic occupations

Artistic occupations encompass many types of creative activity, occur in many venues, and utilise many materials. Composers can, for instance, express their ideas in different formats, from songs to film music to symphonies. Dancers, actors and musicians can employ skills in different venues, from stage to film to television to festivals to the recording studio. Visual artists and craft practitioners have at their fingertips a wide range of media, from paint to stone to video, from clay to textiles to glass. Each category of artistic occupation provides a wide range of possible experiences and expressions.

Within each PAO in the survey, we identified a number of specific types of work or occupations, and asked respondents to identify which ones they had ever engaged in during their careers, and which ones they were engaged in most these days, in terms of time.

The responses indicate, firstly, the range of work that artists have undertaken within their own artform. Table 9 summarises these results by selecting some specific occupations in each artform category. These data illustrate the versatility of artists within their own artform areas. We see, for example, that the great majority of actors have worked at some time in their career on stage (79 per cent of actors) or in television (68 per cent), although only 30 per cent and 21 per cent respectively are working in these occupations as their main line of work at the present time.

Table 9 Range of work within artforms—selected artistic occupations

Proportion of each PAO that:	Has ever engaged in this occupation %	Is most engaged in this occupation now %
Writers		
Novelist	30	14
Screenwriter	40	27
Non-fiction writer	42	22
Visual artists		
Painter	64	44
Sculptor	33	16
Craft practitioners		
Ceramic artist	30	24
Fibre/textile artist	26	21
Metal worker/jeweller	30	24
Actors and directors		
Live stage actor	79	30
Television actor	68	21
Dancers and choreographers		
Dancer, contemporary dance	69	23
Independent choreographer	41	21
Musicians and singers		
Instrumental player, classical or new music	37	18
Instrumental player, music theatre	33	6
Jazz musician	38	18
Composers		
Classical or 'new' music	79	59
Film/television/radio (not advertisements)	32	7

Secondly, as noted above, many artists do not confine their creative work to a single artform but cross over into other artforms. For example, many actors have had experience in dancing or singing, and many writers have been involved in acting or directing.

In Appendix I Table 4.1 we show the proportions of artists within each PAO who have been seriously involved at some time during their career with other artforms. Note the extent to which craft practitioners have worked at visual art and vice versa, or actors have worked in dance and vice versa. As would be expected, there is a lot of crossover between musicians and composers—people who are primarily instrumental musicians or singers also compose, and people who are primarily composers also perform.

These tendencies are summarised in Table 10 where we tabulate the mean number of specific artistic occupations, in and out of an artist's own artform, that have been seriously undertaken by artists in each PAO. For all artists, a mean number of four different occupations have been undertaken, about two-thirds in the artist's own artform and one-third in another artform. Performing artists are the most wide-ranging, especially actors and musicians/composers. Craft practitioners are the most concentrated within their own artform; they and visual artists have undertaken the smallest number of occupations beyond their own artform.

Table 10 Range of arts work undertaken by artists, 2002

Mean number of specific artistic occupations undertaken:	Within artist's own artform(a) (no. per head)	Outside artist's own artform (no. per head)	Total (no. per head)
Writers	2.3	1.0	3.3
Visual artists	2.3	0.7	3.0
Craft practitioners	1.4	0.7	2.1
Actors	4.7	2.2	6.9
Dancers	3.3	1.0	4.3
Musicians	3.4	1.6	6.0
Composers	2.9	3.0	5.9
Community cultural development workers	1.3	2.7	4.0
All artists	2.6	1.3	3.9

(a) Includes artist's specific Principal Artistic Occupation.

The range of artistic achievement

Another way of looking at the diversity of skills which artists apply in their practice is through a listing of their achievements. An analysis of what artists actually produce is also a step towards understanding the breadth and depth of the contribution artists make to Australian society.

Respondents in the survey were asked about their professional output and achievements in the period 1996–2001. In addition, they were invited to nominate which of these achievements they regarded as their major artistic contribution. The achievements identified included:

- having a novel published, or a play, script or screenplay produced
- having a composition commissioned for live performance or recording
- contributing in a major way to the development of a major community arts project or managing a community festival
- having a solo exhibition in a major public or commercial gallery or having work commissioned or purchased by a major gallery or institution
- having a lead role with a major theatrical company or in a film or television role
- directing a stage play, opera, ballet, feature film, television drama or radio play
- dancing a lead role with a dance company or choreographing a work for a major company or independent production
- performing as a solo instrumentalist or singer with an orchestra, or recording a solo album.

The detailed results are shown in Appendix I Tables 4.2.1–4.2.11, which list achievements in the following artistic categories:

- Writing
- Visual art
- Craft
- Acting
- Directing
- Dancing
- Choreography
- Instrumental music
- Singing
- Composing
- Community cultural development.

The statistics in these tables bear testimony to the range of creative output produced by Australia's professional artists. Within each artform the spread of achievement is considerable: writers' produced novels, short stories, poems, plays and scripts of all sorts; the work of visual artists and craft practitioners has been seen in a variety of settings from solo shows to group exhibitions; performing artists have

contributed to the rich output of theatre, dance, music, television, radio and film.

Interestingly, a large number of artists have had their work shown on an Internet site; 21 per cent of writers, 39 per cent of visual artists, 34 per cent of craft practitioners, and 25 per cent of composers have benefited from the Internet as a way of showing their work to the public.

In the previous section, we noted the versatility of artists in moving between artforms and in developing multiple skills for working in areas of practice different from their basic PAO. This versatility is also evident in the cross artform achievements shown in Appendix I Tables 4.2.1–4.2.11. For example, visual artists, actors and composers have had works of creative writing published or produced; a number of craft practitioners have produced works of visual art, and vice versa; writers and musicians have been involved in acting, while a number of actors dance and dancers act; the crossover between musicians and composers is very strong; and community cultural development workers, whose profession is of necessity one of versatility, have significant achievements right across the board.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the artists' work not only moves between artforms but also moves geographically, to be seen or published in places far from the artists' home base. Table 11 shows that between 1996–2001, 58 per cent of the artists surveyed realised a significant achievement interstate, and 37 per cent had engagements, exhibitions, presentations or publications of their work overseas.

It is apparent that the achievements of significant numbers of Australian artists are being recognised nationally and internationally rather than simply locally. In this way artists act as an important means for conveying Australian cultural expression to the nation and to the world.

Table 11 Interstate and international engagements, exhibitions, presentation or publication of Australian artists' work(a)

	Interstate %	International %
Writers	57	40
Visual artists	53	32
Craft practitioners	63	45
Actors	61	44
Dancers	55	44
Musicians	64	36
Composers	72	69
Community cultural development workers	27	13
All artists	58	37

(a) Proportions are for artists in the 2001–02 Artists Survey, covering the period 1996–2001.