

Main findings from *Don't Give Up Your Day Job*



An economic study of professional artists in Australia

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Written by Professor David Throsby and Virginia Hollister of the Division of Economic and Financial Studies, Macquarie University, Sydney

Artists—who are they?

- There are about 45,000 practising professional artists in Australia.
- The term 'practising professional artists' includes artists who are currently active or who have been active in the past five years; the 'professional' aspect limits the survey to those artists who operate at a level and standard of work and with a degree of commitment appropriate to the norms of professional practice within their artform. This excludes hobbyists and amateurs.
- The biggest group is musicians with about 12,000; the second largest group, with about 9,000, is visual artists. Dancers make up the smallest group, with less than 1,500.
- This survey covers the following categories of practising professional artists: writers, visual artists, craft practitioners, actors, directors, dancers, choreographers, musicians, singers, composers, and community cultural development workers.
- Between 1988 and 2001, the number of artists grew by about 13,000 from the 32,000; the growth rate in the number of artists has been 2–3 per cent per year.
- On average, artists tend to be older than the general workforce or the total population. This is attributed to the time it takes for an artist to become established and the long careers of artists beyond the average retiring age of the workforce. The average (mean) age of artists is about 46 years. Writers and composers are the oldest groups on average, with a mean age of 49; dancers make up the youngest group with a mean age of 31.
- The numbers of practising professional artists in the survey was evenly split between women and men. This differs from the general employed workforce where 56 per cent are men and 44 per cent are women.
- About three-quarters of Australia's artists were born in Australia; this is similar to the Australian labour force. The next biggest group of artists were born in the UK and Ireland (13 per cent); this compares with about 6 per cent in the labour force. Artists born in Asia or Africa and the Middle East comprise about 4 per cent of all artists compared with about 10 per cent of the labour force.

Artists—working hard and multi-skilled

- Many Australian artists are having their work recognised nationally and internationally. International exhibition/presentation or publication of their work was reported by 69 per

cent of composers, 45 per cent of craft practitioners, 44 per cent of actors and dancers, 36 per cent of musicians, and by one-third of all visual artists.

- As with other professionals, artists are a highly educated group. Three-quarters have had formal education in a university, College of Advanced Education, teachers college, TAFE or specialist artist training institution. Four out of ten have had private training.
- Almost two-thirds of all artists work at more than one job—56 per cent hold two jobs and seven per cent hold three jobs. Overall, 43 per cent of artists are engaged in some work in an arts related field, and one-third do some work in an area not related to the arts.
- Artists are versatile across artforms and develop multiple skills for working in areas different from their principal artistic occupation. Many visual artists and actors have been involved in writing; many writers have been involved in acting; many dancers have been involved in acting.
- Many Australian initial creative artists have had their work shown via the Internet. These include 39 per cent of visual artists, 34 per cent of craft practitioners, 25 per cent of composers and 21 per cent of writers.

Artists incomes—low and intermittent

- The survey income figures are for the 2000–01 financial year and are earned income excluding interest and dividends, etc. The figures show gross income before taxes.
- Typically, artists have multiple job-holding patterns. An artist works in a ‘principal artistic occupation’ which can include rehearsal, practice, preparation and career administration. Many artists have ‘arts-related’ work including teaching in the artist’s artform or writing about the arts. Many also have ‘non-arts’ work which includes paid work unrelated to any artistic field.
- Artists were asked about their earned income for the 2000–01 financial year. Since most artists earn low incomes and a very few earn high incomes, the income statistics presented in the report concentrate on median income. This is the income in a distribution which is the half-way point, so that half earn above the median income and half earn below that figure.
- Half of the artists in the survey had an creative income of less than \$7,300 in the 2000–01 financial year. (The unusual distribution of artists creative incomes with many low incomes and few high incomes resulted in a mean creative income of just over \$17,000.)
- Performing artists had the highest median ‘creative incomes’ in the survey: actors and musicians had median ‘creative incomes’ of \$10,500, and dancers had median ‘creative incomes’ of \$12,900. Visual artists had the lowest median ‘creative income’ of \$3,100.
- Total median incomes (‘arts incomes’ plus ‘non-arts incomes’) in 2000–01 ranged from \$35,800 for musicians to \$22,600 for both craft practitioners and community cultural development workers. The median income in 2000–01 for all artists in the survey was \$30,000.

- Only about a quarter of all artists work at their principal artistic occupation as employees on a permanent or casual basis being paid a salary or wages. The remaining three-quarters work as freelancers or as self-employed.
- Artists median total incomes of \$30,000 are considerably less than other occupations requiring similar periods of professional training. The median income of full and part-time ('main job') employees classified as 'professional' was \$43,700 in 2000–01, and for occupations classified as 'managerial/administrative' it was \$54,500.
- Over the past 15 years, the relative financial disadvantage of artists compared with other occupations (as measured by median incomes) has worsened.
- Female artists earn considerably less than male artists. The median 'creative income' of male artists in 2000–01 was \$9,400 compared with \$4,500 for female artists. Median total income (all 'arts work' plus "non-arts work") for men was \$35,000 and for women it was \$23,600.
- About half of the artists in the survey had experienced some period of unemployment in the five years preceding the survey, and half of those had applied for unemployment relief.

Artists in regional Australia

- About three-quarters of Australia's artists live in capital cities. This is a stronger concentration than in the total adult population. Arts venues and facilities and the larger arts organisations are concentrated in the cities.
- The most dispersed group of artists are craft practitioners, with just over half living in capital cities. Eight out of ten performing artists are in the capital cities.
- About 85 per cent of regional artists work as self-employed or freelance, compared with about 70 per cent of capital city artists.

Professional practice issues

- Forty per cent of artists have their work handled by an agent or gallery dealer or manager. It is customary for actors to have an agent and around three-quarters of the actors in the survey reported having an agent. Around four out of 10 visual artists and craft practitioners reported having a gallery dealer and a similar proportion of musicians have a manager.
- In response to the introduction of the new tax system, about 80 per cent of artists registered for an ABN and 38 per cent have a GST registration. The relatively low proportion who have GST registration is a reflection of the low incomes earned by artists. About half of all artists in the survey reported being affected by the new tax system by having to spend more time on administrative matters, use an accountant or buy new software for accounting purposes.

Artists from a non-English speaking background

- Of the artists surveyed, 92 per cent had English as their first language. This is higher than the comparable figure of 82 per cent of the total Australian workforce. The proportion is around 95 per cent for actors, writers and musicians. Craft practitioners are the group with the lowest proportion: 85 per cent of craft practitioners have English as their first language.
- Artists from a non-English speaking background earn less than those with an English speaking background. The median total income (arts plus non-arts) for artists from a non-English speaking background was \$25,400 in 2000–01, compared with \$30,100 for those with an English speaking background.

Artists with disabilities

- Around 10 per cent of the artists surveyed reported living with some form of disability. Of these, about two-thirds report a physical disability and one-third have a mental illness or intellectual impairment.
- Of the artists with a disability, about 20 per cent say that their disability impacts on their artistic practice most of the time or all of the time, while another 17 per cent say it has no effect at all.