

Livelihoods of Visual Artists in England

Steering Group Statement

Arts Council England funded a national study to find out directly from visual artists in England about the economic, social and cultural factors which affect their ability to develop a sustainable practice

As a range of sector support organisations who collectively represent, support, champion and nurture artists, the Steering Group was pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to the study.

This is the first comprehensive study in over a decade about how visual artists in England live. The study involved three key research stages: a review of literature and existing data; a large-scale online survey of over 2,000 artists gathering quantitative data, and; qualitative research involving five focus groups.

The Steering Group, who collectively represent, support, champion and nurture artists commented: "This extensive piece of work confirms much of what we know from working with artists everyday: change is needed if we want to have a resilient and diverse visual arts sector in the future."

Julie Lomax, CEO, a-n The Artists Information Company added "Whilst being an artist has never been an easy career choice, findings from gender disparity and low levels of income, to juggling a portfolio of low paid precarious roles, the evidence clearly demonstrates that the practice of being an artist is becoming increasingly hard. This research is an important first step in evidencing the barriers artists face and helping the visual arts sector plan for the future. By identifying the strategies we can collectively put in place to support artists we can help secure the future for visual artists."

The study has achieved the creation of a detailed baseline. It has provided a vital snapshot of the working lives of visual artists but it strongly shows a sector with a number of real challenges and a situation that needs monitoring. It also has the potential to represent the first step in a process of developing a more refined, detailed and longitudinal evidence base regarding the livelihoods of visual artists in England. Considering the demographic findings there appears to be an important opportunity to follow the changes in demographic, education and earning potential of the community in order to anticipate changing support needs.

a-n The Artists Information Company is committed to updating this research in 2020. The findings will help to focus support where it is most needed to ensure a resilient and diverse visual arts sector in the future.

Notes

- Independent research company TBR, working with a-n The Artists Information Company and James Doerer, was commissioned to deliver the project.
- A broad range of visual arts sector support organisations formed a steering group including: ACAVA (Association for Cultural Advancement through Visual Art), Artquest, AUE (Artists' Union England), Axisweb, Crafts Council, CVAN (Contemporary Visual Arts Network), DACS, engage, East Street Arts, NSEAD (National Society for Education in Art and Design), Space Studios, LADA (Live Art Development Agency) and Voluntary Arts.