



Art Gallery of York University
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www.theAGYUisOutThere.org

Waging Culture: The Socio-economic status of Canadian Visual Artists

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The Art Gallery of York University has conducted the first national survey of Canadian visual artists since Statistics Canada's 1993 Cultural Labour Force survey. Unlike studies that use Census data, this study analyses both the sources of revenue for artists and their practice expenses. The bottom line for artists is dismal, with the typical artist *losing* \$556 in 2007 on their practice. (Other income sources bring median total earnings to \$20,000 – not starving, but certainly not affluent.)

According to the study, there are between 22,500 and 27,800 visual artists in Canada. The average artist is 43 years of age, with 80% practicing professionally before they were 35. Compared to the national total labour force, artists are more likely to be female, anglophone, in a relationship, and born Canadian, and less likely to be members of a visible minority. They are overwhelmingly more likely to be highly educated, with an average of more than six years post-secondary education.

Report highlights:

1. The typical artist made, from all income sources, \$20,000 in 2007, significantly less than the typical Canadian income of \$26,850. Of more significance, however, is that only 43.6% of visual artists made any money at all from their studio practice. In fact, the typical artist lost \$556 from their studio practice in 2007. The vast majority of an artist's studio revenue is from sales (54%), with grants (34%) and artist fees (12%) making up the rest. Expenses that exceed an artist's revenue are covered by other employment income.
2. Artists pay a significant economic penalty to pursue their practice, and are, through real monetary contributions, replacing potential income-earning employment with what amounts to free labour. In 2007, the average artist worked 26 hours per week on their studio practice, 14.5 hours on art-related employment, and 7.6 hours on non-art-related employment. In addition, they volunteered just over 3 hours a week to art-related activities. Those artists who spent a majority of their employment time in the studio earned significantly less total income, a median of \$15,000, versus \$28,994 for artists who spent most of their time in art-related employment, and \$21,793 for those who spent most of their time in non-art-related employment.
3. Compared to artists who received no grants in 2007, artists who earned large (\$5,000+) grants in 2007 also had higher levels of self-generated practice-based income from both sales and artist fees, while artists who earned smaller grants (less than \$5,000) had higher levels of artist fees, but a lower level of sales. Large grants resulted in higher studio expenses and more hours dedicated to studio work, while small grants only offset net practice-based losses. Grants, in essence, buy time and materials for the production of art and not increased living standards as average total income across the three categories is comparable.
4. Visual artists are extremely well educated, even though there is no correlation between their education and their practice-based revenue. Over 84% have at least an undergraduate degree, and almost 45% have graduate degrees (compared to 23% and 7% of the total labour force, respectively). The higher an artist's education level, the less they earn from their practice after expenses; other income sources, however, do increase proportionately to the levels of education.

5. More than 30% of artists have no supplementary health benefits, and an additional 22% have only self-financed benefits. Over one-third of artists have no retirement funds whatsoever, and another third only have self-financed retirement funds.

Some additional findings:

- Artists in Quebec earn the largest net income from their studio practices (median: \$1,383) and those in Alberta lose the most (median: -\$2,000). Ironically, artists in Quebec have the lowest total income (median: \$15,089) and artists in Alberta the second highest (median: \$21,646). Artists in Ontario have the highest median income, at \$22,957.
- The wage gap between male and female artists is significantly lower than in the labour force as a whole, a mere 10% for artists versus 36% for the total labour force. The difference in sales, however, is a full 48%.
- Immigrant artists have higher total incomes than Canadian-born artists, if only nominally so.
- Caucasian artists have slightly higher total income than visible minority artists.
- 54.5% of practicing artists own their own homes, compared with 68.7% of the total labour force.

The Waging Culture data was collected online, using Respondent Driven Sampling, from July through December of 2008 and covers the 2007 calendar year. Demographic information is accurate within $\pm 3.96\%$, 19 times out of 20. Financial information is accurate within $\pm 5.83\%$, 19 times out of 20.

The final report is available in pdf form as of 31 March 2009 on the Waging Culture website.
<http://www.theAGYUisOutThere.org/wagingculture>

For more information, please contact Michael Maranda at wagingculture@theAGYUisOutThere.org.

The Art Gallery of York University is a university-affiliated public non-profit contemporary art gallery supported by York University, The Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, the City of Toronto through the Toronto Arts Council, and our membership.

The AGYU is located in the Accolade East Building, 4700 Keele Street Toronto.

Gallery hours: Monday to Friday, 10 am–4 pm;

Wednesday, 10 am–8 pm;

Sunday from noon–5 pm;

Closed Saturday.

