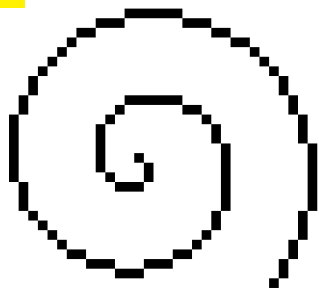


Survey Report: A study on the financial state of visual artists today



The Creative Independent is a resource of emotional and practical guidance for artists of all types. Our aim is to publish resources and produce programming that make it easier to thrive as a creative person. In our work, we've noticed a lack






of accessible information on how visual artists can expect to sustain themselves financially. Because of this, we've seen how hard it can be for aspiring artists to make informed decisions and plan for the future.



In spring of 2018, we conducted an anonymous survey for visual artists asking them to share how they were able or unable to achieve financial stability. With this report, we hope to paint a clearer picture of how structures of the art world work (or don't work) to grow artists' careers, help them earn a living, and satisfy their overall human needs.



By capturing the opinions and perspectives of 1,016 individuals, this report offers a snapshot of the financial state of visual artists today. We hope that what follows will be useful if you're working to forge your own path as a visual artist. If you'd like to make your own analysis of our survey's data, you can download the entire data set as a CSV file.

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■ Who responded to this survey?

1,016 visual artists responded to our survey about financial stability.

Experience in the art world

Most respondents had less experience in the art world, with 37% saying they'd only been active in the art world for 1-5 years. 29% said they'd been active in the art world for 5-10 years, and just 32% said they'd been a part of the art world for more than 10 years.

Artistic medium

Respondents were allowed to choose up to three primary formats/mediums that best described their artwork. The most popular format was 2D artwork (68%), followed by digital work (34%), 3D work (31%), and video (27%). The least-popular formats were design (18%) and performance art (16%).

Gender

Half of respondents identified as female, while 40% identified as male, and 5% identified as non-binary. The remaining 5% preferred not to say, or left the question blank.

Racial diversity

60% of respondents identified as white, followed by Asian (nearly 10%), Hispanic or Latino (8%), and Black or African American (4%). 18.5% of artists chose "other" or "prefer not to say."

Location

While three quarters of respondents came from the United States, people responded from 52 total countries around the world. After the US, the top-reporting countries were the UK (6%), Canada (4.5%), and France (3%). How do we define what it means to be "financially stable?"

■ How do we define what it means to be “financially stable?”

Most respondents felt that being financially stable meant “reliably having enough money to cover basic expenses, plus reliably saving money.”

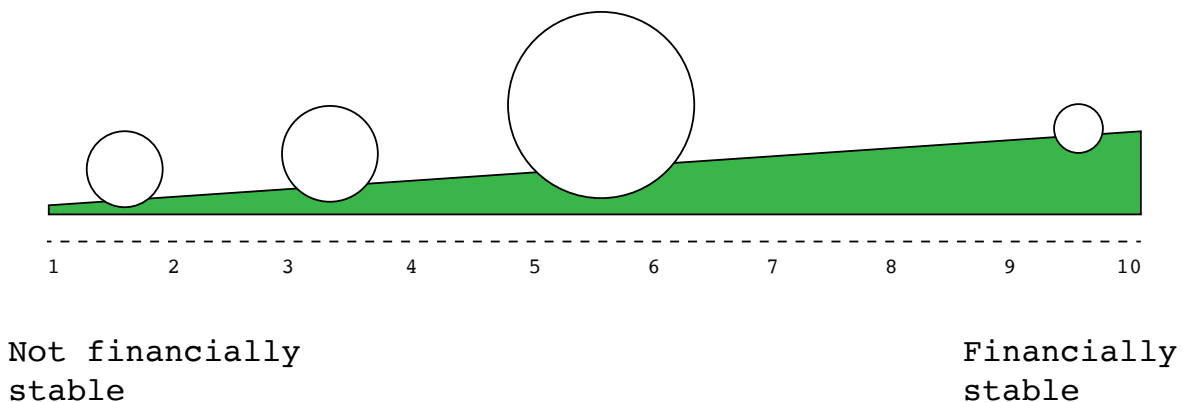
Just under a third of respondents said it meant “reliably having enough money to cover basic expenses, plus sometimes saving money.” Only 9% of respondents felt it meant “never needing to think about money at all.”

■ How financially stable do artists feel now?

We asked respondents to rank how financially stable they felt on a scale of 1–10, with 1 being “not at all financially stable,” and 10 being “completely financially stable.”

On a scale of 1–10, artists’ median financial stability ranking was 5.

While there was a wide spread of responses, most people felt fairly neutral about their own degree of financial stability. However, 12% of respondents rated their level of financial stability as a 1 (not at all financially stable). Comparatively, a total of only 3% of respondents rated their financial stability level as either a 9 or a 10 (completely financially stable).



Analysis: What factors were shown to influence the median financial stability ranking of 5?

Gender: Female-identifying respondents had a median financial stability ranking of 4 (1 point lower than the median), and respondents who identified as “non-binary” had a median financial stability ranking of 3 (2 points lower than the median).

Race: Those who identified as “Asian,” “Black or African American,” and “Hispanic or Latino” had a median financial stability ranking of 4, or one point lower than the overall median.

Yearly income: Unsurprisingly, those who reported earning more money also reported feeling more financially stable. The breaking point appeared to be the \$50K–\$60K threshold—respondents making that amount or higher had a stability ranking that was higher than the median. On the other end of the spectrum, those who made less than \$30K annually had a median financial stability ranking that was lower than the median.

Experience: Surprisingly, years active in the art world had little effect on respondent’s financial stability. While those who had only been active for 1–5 years had a median financial stability ranking of 4 (1 point lower than the median), all those who had been active for 5 or more years shared the median financial stability ranking of 5.

Time spent self-promoting: Respondents who spent 3 or more hours per week posting to social media or otherwise marketing their own work felt less financially stable, with a median financial stability ranking of 4. Those who spent 1–2 hours per week promoting their work shared the median stability ranking of 5. Those who spent no time self-promoting felt slightly less stable, with a median stability ranking of 4.5

Time spent socializing: Those who attended no art-related events per week had a median financial stability ranking of 4, versus the overall median of 5. Those who attended 1–2 art-related events per week shared the median stability ranking of 5. Those who attended 3 or more art events per week had a slightly lower median stability ranking of 4.5.

Audience size: Those with a total online audience of fewer than 2,000 people had a median financial stability ranking of 4 (1 point lower than the median).

■ How much income are artists earning annually?

We asked respondents to share the range of their total yearly income, in increments of \$10K (or in the USD-equivalent of their country's currency).

Overall, the median income was \$20–30K per year, and almost 60% of respondents reported making less than \$30K per year.

For comparison: In 2016, the median household income in the United States was about \$58K per year (via census.gov). Our survey found that only 17% of responding artists made more than that, and only 22% were in the \$50K–\$60K range or higher.

How much income artists reported making annually:

21% make between \$0–\$10K a year

14% make between \$10K–\$20K a year

23% make between \$20–\$30K a year

9% make between \$30K–\$40K a year

11% make between \$40K–\$50K a year

5% make between \$50K–\$60K a year

7% make between \$60K–\$70K a year

7% make more than \$70K a year

3% didn't respond

Analysis: What factors were shown to influence the median yearly income of \$20-30K?

Gender: Male-identifying respondents had a higher median yearly income of \$30-40K, while female-identifying and non-binary identifying respondents shared the median yearly income of \$20-30K.

Race: Those who identified as "Asian" or "Middle Eastern" had a lower median income of \$10-20K per year, versus the average of \$20-30K per year. (Only those races with which 20 or more respondents identified were reviewed here)

Geographic Location: Those who responded from France, Germany, and the United Kingdom had a lower median yearly income of \$10-20K. Those who responded from the United States had a higher median yearly income of \$30-40K. (Only those countries from which 20 or more artists responded were reviewed here)

Experience: Those who reported that they'd been active in the art world for ten or more years made a higher median income of \$30-40K.

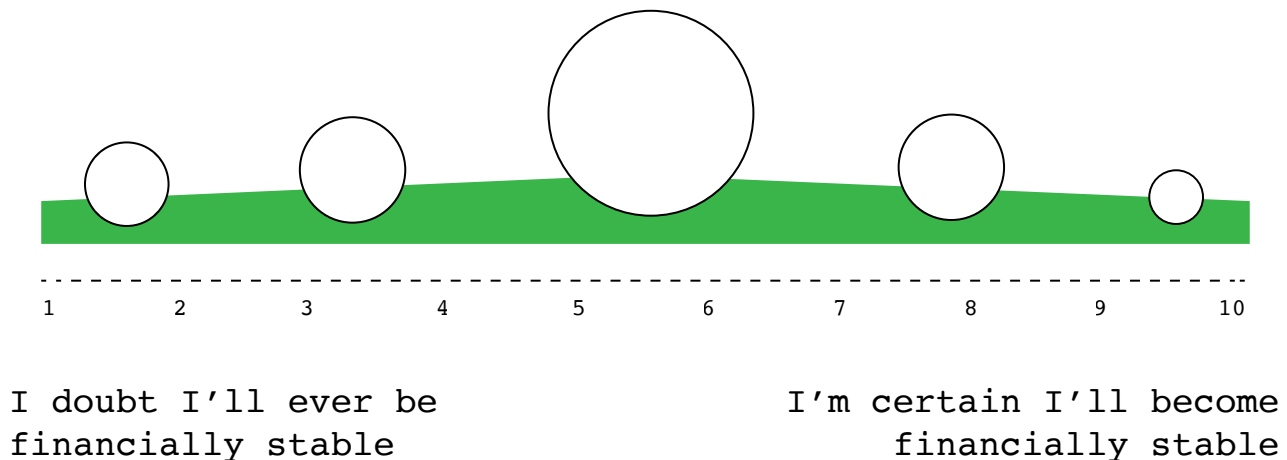
Financial Stability Ranking: Unsurprisingly, median yearly income increased as respondent's financial stability ranking (how they'd rank their level of financial stability from 1-10) rose.

■ How confident are artists that they'll be able to become financially stable—even if they aren't financially stable now?

We asked respondents to rank how confident they were in their ability to become financially stable while continuing to pursue their artistic ambitions, with 1 being "I doubt I'll ever be financially stable," and 10 being "I'm certain I'll be able to become financially stable."

In comparison to how financially stable they reported feeling at present, respondents felt only slightly more optimistic about how financially stable they might feel in the future.

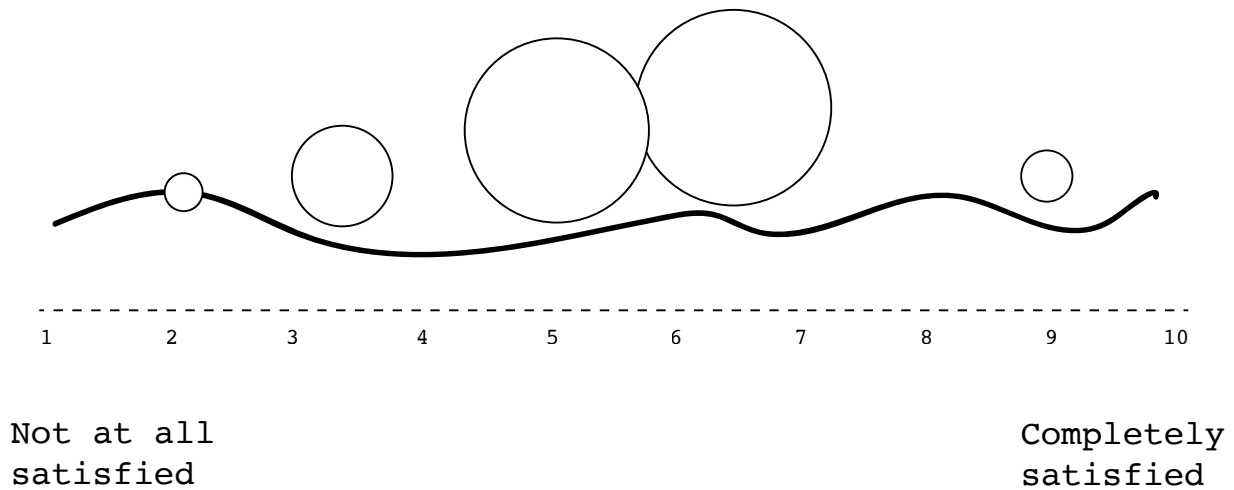
On a scale of 1-10, the median response was 5—meaning most people feel fairly ambivalent about their ability to become financially stable in the future.



■ How satisfying is it to live the life of an artist?

We asked respondents to consider their overall level of satisfaction with their life as an artist, and rank it on a scale of 1 (not at all satisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied).

Overall, the median satisfaction rating was 6, with most respondents falling somewhere in the middle of the spectrum.



Analysis: What factors were shown to influence the median satisfaction rating of 6?

Experience: The longer a respondent had been active in the art world, the more satisfied they were (those who were active for 20+ years had a median satisfaction rating of 7).

Race: Those who identified as "African American or Black" reported being slightly more satisfied (with a median satisfaction rating of 7).

Gender: Those who identified as "non-binary" reported being overall less satisfied, with a median satisfaction rating of 5.

Art-related income: Those who reported earning part of their income from gallery sales, grants, awards, private commissions, or sponsorships had a median satisfaction rating of 7.

Business practices: Those who spent 25 or more hours per week on administration activities related to their work had an average satisfaction rating of 7.

Time spent making art: The number of hours per week respondents spent making work directly corresponded to their satisfaction ranking, with more hours in the studio correlating to a higher satisfaction ranking.

■ What sources of income are most helpful to artists?

We asked respondents to choose the top three types of income or funding that have been most helpful in sustaining their art practice.

“Doing freelance/contract work” was by far the most popular choice (61% of all respondents listed this as one of their top three income sources).

“Having a job that’s unrelated to my practice” and “having a job that’s related to my practice” tied for second place (42% of all respondents listed this as one of their top three income sources).

“Having family support or inheritance” was listed by nearly 29% of respondents as one of their top-three sources of income.

Doing freelance / contract work

Having a job that’s unrelated to my practice

Having a job that’s in the same field as my practice

Family

Private commissions

Grants

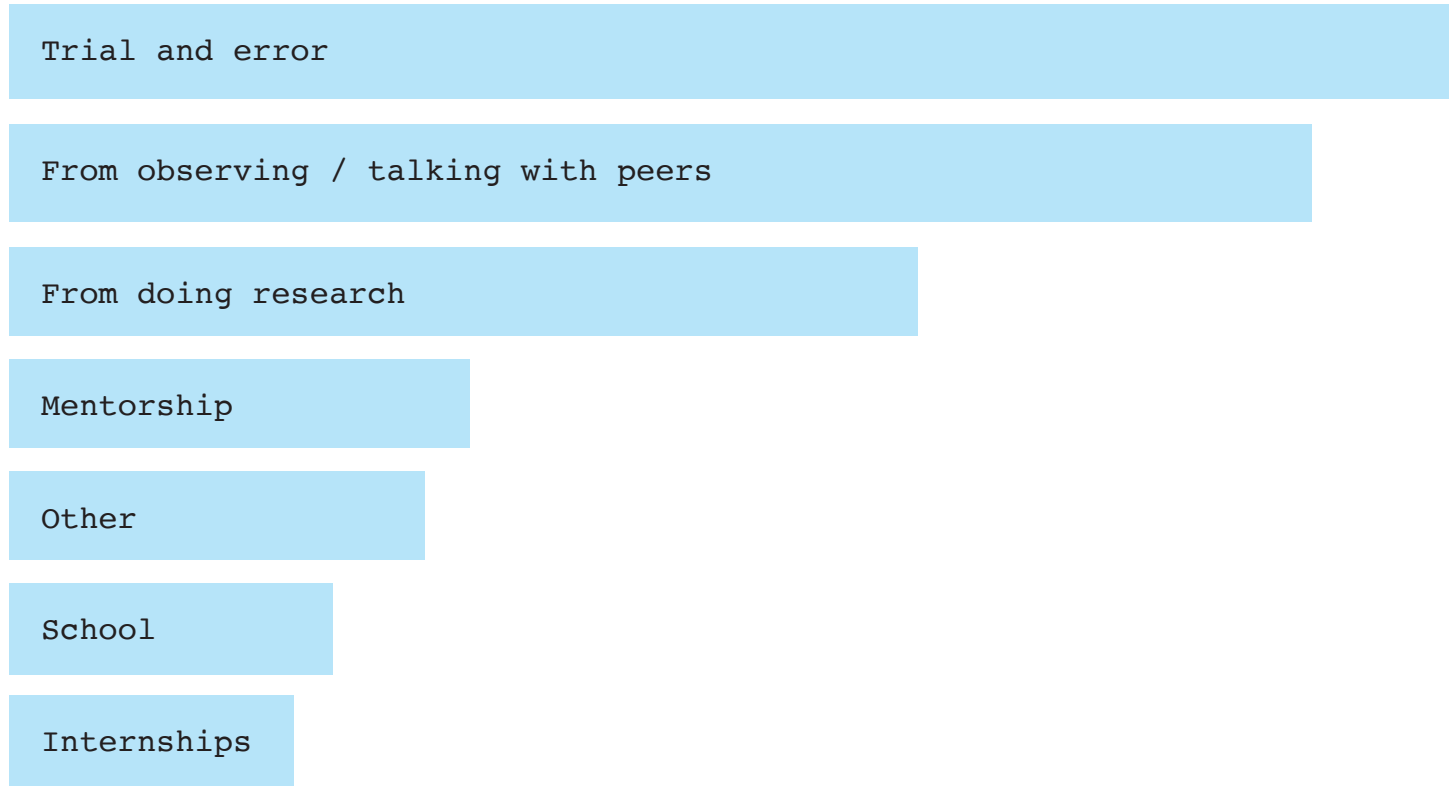
Gallery sales

The data suggests that most respondents are not making significant amounts of money directly through their artwork. In fact, just 12% of respondents listed “gallery sales” as one of their top three most-helpful sources of income.

■ How are artists learning how to become financially stable?

We asked respondents where and how they'd learned the most helpful strategies for becoming financially stable.

Our survey found that most artists are figuring things out through trial and error (74%), by observing and talking with their peers (67%), and by doing their own research (40%).



The data suggests that artists are not learning how to financially sustain themselves through school, internships, or any other official education programs.

■ What factors most affect an artist's ability to become financially stable?

We asked respondents to choose up to three factors that had most helped them in their quest to become financially stable.

Our survey found that artists were most likely to credit their relationships and support network as top factors contributing to their financial stability.

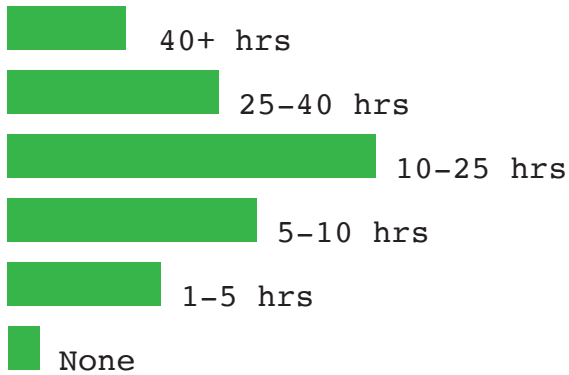
Over half of respondents also credited their strong work ethic as a leading factor. Interestingly, only 26% of respondents credited their ability to market their own work as a leading factor in their ability to become financially stable. The factors that appeared least helpful overall were receiving high-profile awards, getting favorable press write-ups, and working on private commissions.

■ How much of an artist's income actually comes from their artwork?

We asked respondents to share what percentage of their total income came directly from their art practice.

Almost half of respondents said that just 0-10% of their income was generated through their art practice. Only 17% said they were making 75%-100% of their income through their artwork.

■ How many hours per week do artists actually spend making art?

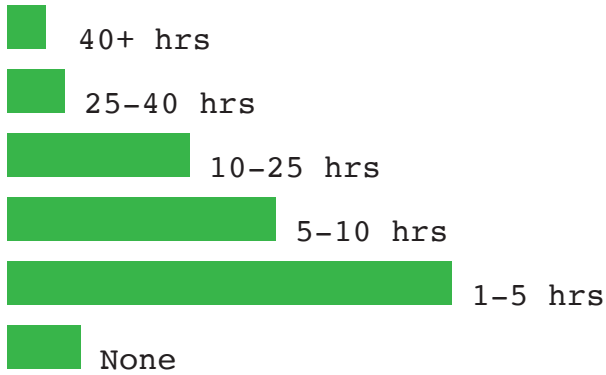


When asked to share how many hours per week they're usually able to spend in the studio making artwork, approximately one third of respondents said they treated art-making like a part-time job, spending 10-25 hours per week making art.

39% reported that on an average week, they were only able to spend 10 hours or fewer making art.

Just 10% of artists said they treated art-making like a full-time job, spending 40 hours or more making art per week.

■ How many hours per week are most artists spending on the business aspects of their creative practice?

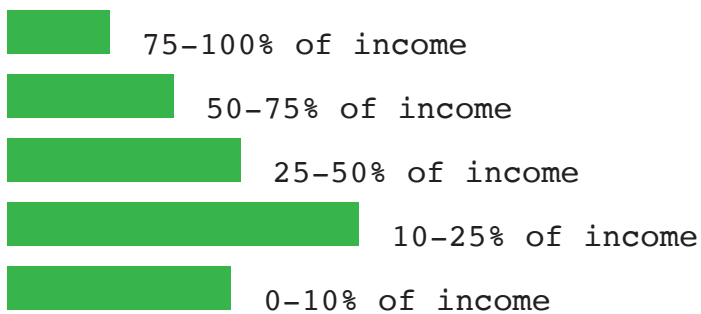


According to our data, most artists are not devoting a significant amount of time to the business aspects of their practice.

26% said they spent 5–10 hours per week on things like emailing and planning, and just 6% said they did more than 25 hours of admin work per week. 8% said they did no admin work at all.

42% said they spent 5 hours or fewer doing admin work each week.

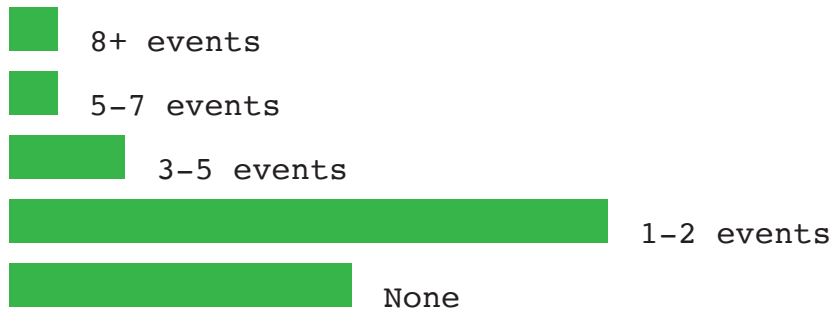
■ Are most artists reinvesting a lot of their income back into their practice?



When asked how much of their total income they spent on things like studio rent and supplies, most artists (about a third of respondents) said they reinvested 10–25% of their income back into their practice. 21% said they reinvested between 25–50% of their income.

27% of artists said they tended to reinvest more than half of their income just to keep making art.

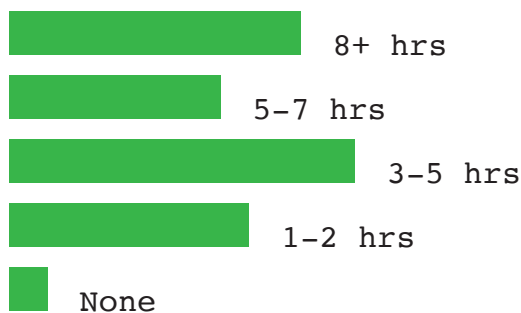
■ How often are artists attending art-related events?



When asked to share how many openings, talks, or other art events they went to per week, the vast majority (57%) said they attended 1-2 art events per week. Just 10% went to 3 or more art events per week.

31% of artists said that on an average week, they didn't attend a single art event.

■ How much art-related news and media are artists consuming?

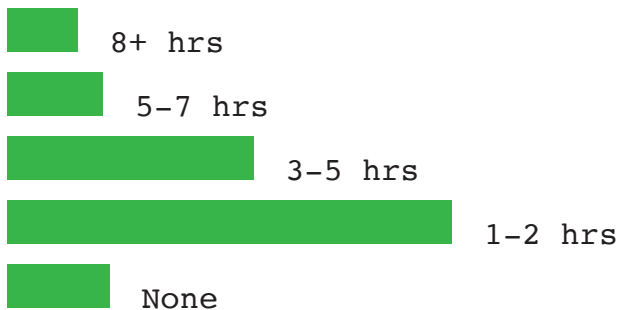


When asked how many hours per week they usually spent consuming art-related content on social media or in the news, most people (32%) reported spending 3-5 hours per week.

27% reported spending more than 8 hours per week consuming art-related content.

Just 1% of artists reported spending no time reading art-related news and social content per week.

■ How much time are artists spending promoting their work online?

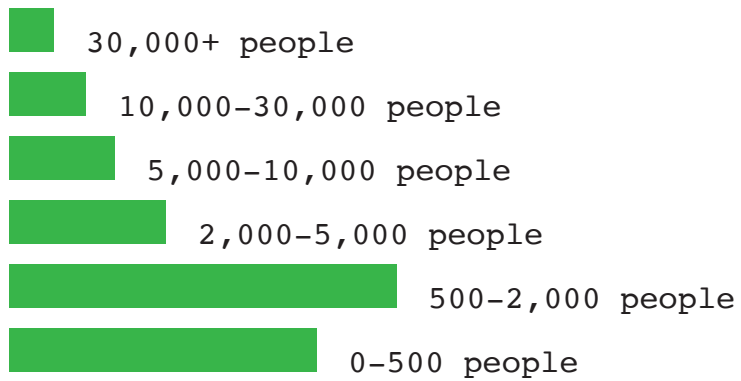


When asked how many hours they usually spent promoting their work each week (through things like social media and email), about half of artists reported spending just 1-2 hours per week.

17% said they spent more than 5 hours per week promoting their work.

Just 10% of artists said they spent no time promoting or marketing their work each week.

■ How large are most artists' online audiences?



When asked how large their online audience was—counting all of their social followers and email subscribers together—the most common range was between 500-2,000 people (36%). The second most common range was 0-500 people.

Just 17% of artists said their online audiences tallied more than 5,000 people.

■ On working with galleries

29% of survey respondents (291 artists) said they had been represented by a gallery before. The below data reflects their responses—those who hadn't been represented by a gallery were asked to skip this section.

DOES WORKING WITH A GALLERY HELP ARTISTS FEEL MORE FINANCIALLY STABLE?



DOES BEING REPRESENTED BY A GALLERY HELP ARTISTS TO DEVELOP THEIR PRACTICE?



HOW MUCH DOES BEING REPRESENTED BY A GALLERY HELP YOUR CAREER?



HOW MUCH WOULD ARTISTS RECOMMEND BEING REPRESENTED BY A GALLERY TO SOMEONE ELSE?



0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

M E D I A N R A N K I N G

Key findings on galleries: Our data suggests that being represented by a gallery is usually not a helpful way for an artist to pursue financial stability. However, being represented by a gallery does appear to be somewhat helpful in growing an artist's career.

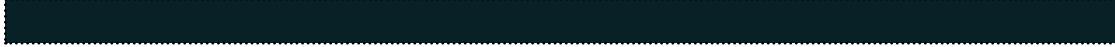
■ On earning art degrees

63% of survey respondents (635 artists) said they had attended art school and earned an MFA or other art-related degree. The below data reflects their responses—those who hadn't earned an MFA or other art-related degree were asked to skip this section.

DOES EARNING AN MFA OR OTHER ART-RELATED DEGREE HELP ARTISTS BECOME FINANCIALLY STABLE?



DOES EARNING AN MFA OR OTHER ART-RELATED DEGREE HELP ARTISTS TO DEVELOP THEIR WORK?



DOES EARNING AN MFA OR OTHER ART-RELATED DEGREE HELP ARTISTS TO BUILD A STRONGER CAREER?



WOULD ARTISTS WHO EARNED AN MFA OR ART-RELATED DEGREE RECOMMEND THE EXPERIENCE TO SOMEONE ELSE?



0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

M E D I A N R A N K I N G

Key findings on art degrees: Overall, artists feel that attending art school is mostly helpful as a way to develop their practice. However, earning an art degree does not set artists up for financial stability.

■ On institutional support

41% of survey respondents (418 artists) said they had received grants, fellowships, paid residencies, or support from other types of institutions. The below data reflects their responses—those who hadn't received any institutional support were asked to skip this section.

IS RECEIVING INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT HELPING ARTISTS TO FEEL MORE FINANCIALLY STABLE?



IS RECEIVING INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT HELPING ARTISTS TO MEANINGFULLY DEVELOP THEIR WORK?



IS RECEIVING INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT HELPING ARTISTS TO BUILD THEIR CAREERS?



WOULD ARTISTS WHO'VE RECEIVED INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT RECOMMEND THE EXPERIENCE TO SOMEONE ELSE?



0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

MEDIAN RANKING

Key findings on institutional support: Receiving grants, paid residencies, fellowships, and other types of institutional support does not seem to significantly help artists with their long-term financial stability. However, most respondents would strongly recommend applying for institutional support to other artists as a way to develop their work.

■ On creating commissions

59% of survey respondents (597 artists) said they had created commissions for clients (either corporate, private, or other). The below data reflects their responses—those who hadn't created any custom commissions were asked to skip this section.

IS RECEIVING INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT HELPING ARTISTS TO FEEL MORE FINANCIALLY STABLE?



IS RECEIVING INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT HELPING ARTISTS TO MEANINGFULLY DEVELOP THEIR WORK?



IS RECEIVING INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT HELPING ARTISTS TO BUILD THEIR CAREERS?



WOULD ARTISTS WHO'VE RECEIVED INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT RECOMMEND THE EXPERIENCE TO SOMEONE ELSE?



0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

M E D I A N R A N K I N G

Key findings on commissions: Overall, most artists feel somewhat positive about creating commissions as a way to work towards financial stability.