

# National Endowment for the Arts



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### ARTISTS IN THE WORKFORCE

1990—2005



America tends to see its artists as visionaries, rebels, outsiders, and eccentrics. These long-standing stereotypes have become mainstays of popular culture—perhaps because they are so entertaining. A troubled dreamer, a footloose bohemian, or a charming deadbeat can steal the scene from any workaday character. Presented from whatever perspective—adoring, puzzled, bemused, or even hostile—these stereotypes almost always portray artists as outsiders, fascinating creatures who somehow manage to survive on the margins of society.

The purpose of the new NEA report, *Artists in the Workforce*, is to demonstrate—in cold, hard, unpoetic facts—that such caricatures misrepresent American artists and even contribute to their marginalization in society.

The time has come to insist on an obvious but overlooked fact—artists are workers. They make things and perform services, just like other workers, and these goods and services have value—not merely in lofty spiritual terms but also in dollars and cents. Without denying the higher purposes of the artistic vocation, this report shows that artists play an important role in America’s cultural vitality and economic prosperity.

There are now almost two million Americans who describe their primary occupation as artist. Representing 1.4 percent of the U.S. labor force, artists constitute a sizeable class of workers—only slightly smaller than the total number of active-duty and reserve personnel in the U.S. military (2.2 million). Artists represent a larger group than the legal profession (lawyers, judges, and paralegals), medical doctors (physicians, surgeons, and dentists), or agricultural workers (farmers, ranchers, foresters, and fishers).

The size of the artistic community gives the group enormous aggregate income—approximately \$70 billion annually. In terms of sheer numbers, artists represent a powerful labor force whose economic contributions go largely unrecognized by both the general public and the government.

Compared to other U.S. workers, American artists tend to be better educated and more entrepreneurial. Artists are twice as likely to have earned a college degree as other members of the U.S. labor force, though they receive relatively less financial compensation for their educational level. Artists are also 3.5 times more likely to be self-employed. American artists have learned to be creative not merely in their chosen fields but also in how they manage their lives.

*Artists in the Workforce* also documents the maturation of American cultural life. The number of artists in the U.S. has remained constant as a percentage of the population for the past 15 years. Between 1970 and 1990 the number of artists doubled in the United States—reflecting the great expansion of theaters, galleries, orchestras, and presenting venues as well as the steady growth of both university programs and the entertainment

industry. In that heady climate, artists grew at nearly twice the rate of the overall labor force. As the current survey demonstrates, the number of artists is now growing at approximately the same rate as the total labor force. The stability of this measurement suggests the place of artists in the American workforce has achieved a point of equilibrium.

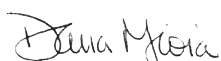
American artists continue to cluster in large metropolitan areas. The greater Los Angeles area is now the major employer of artists in the U.S., followed by New York, Chicago, Washington, and Boston. More than one-fifth of American artists live in those five areas, and artists and arts organizations play a major role in local economies. Not surprisingly, artists gravitate to areas where there are employment possibilities from cultural institutions and creative industries.

Yet artists continue to spread across the country. The West and the South have experienced the greatest recent growth in artist populations—reflecting larger demographic and economic trends. Sunbelt cities dominate the list of metropolitan areas with the highest per capita concentration of artists. Nine of the top fifteen cities with the highest concentrations of artists are now in the Sunbelt: San Francisco, Santa Fe, Los Angeles, Boulder, Santa Cruz, Santa Barbara, Nashville, Orlando, and San Luis Obispo.

While American artists are not unemployed, they remain conspicuously underemployed. One-third of artists work for only part of the year. Actors, dancers, choreographers, musicians, and other entertainers are especially vulnerable to seasonal unemployment. These statistics reveal a huge loss of cultural and creative expertise. Such widespread underemployment seems almost tragic in a nation whose public schools have increasingly eliminated arts education.

There is no way to understand the new American economy without recognizing the role of its two million creative workers. In the 21st century, entertainment is an American global industry. Design is an essential element of all consumer products and services. Writers, broadcasters, actors, animators, musicians, and producers create the programming that drives the new electronic media. In cities across the nation, performing arts centers occupy key civic positions of enormous economic impact, and the arts have become indispensable to local community identity. Communities have also discovered that attracting creative workers and industries bolsters their economies.

From global exports to local investments, the new American economy depends on imagination, innovation, and creativity, and those are the skills that artists develop, nurture, and promote. Isn't it time that the nation notices?



**Dana Gioia**

*Chairman, National Endowment for the Arts*

This report uses United States census occupation data to analyze artists' demographic and employment patterns. It represents the first comprehensive look at the nation's working artists in the new century. The study also marks the first use of American Community Survey data to profile artist occupations.

See [www.nea.gov/research/ResearchReports\\_chrono.html](http://www.nea.gov/research/ResearchReports_chrono.html) to obtain the full report.

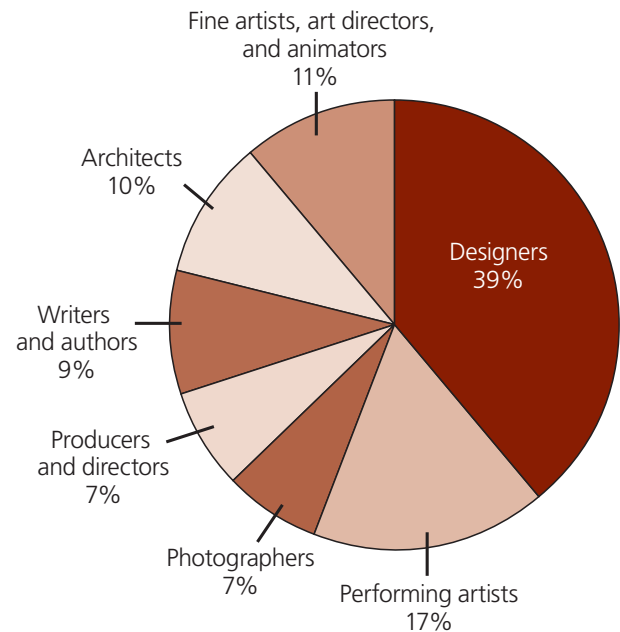


## KEY FINDINGS

### 1. Nearly two million Americans are artists.

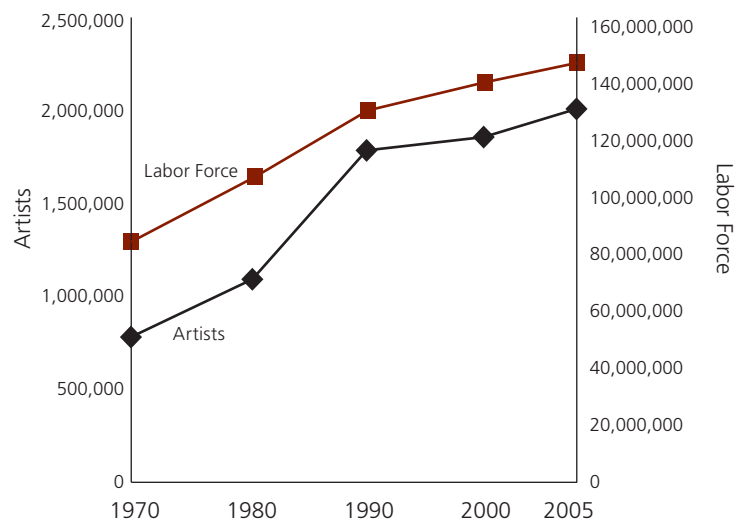
- 1.99 million Americans identified an artist occupation as their primary job.
- The total excludes many people with secondary employment as artists—an estimated 300,000 Americans.
- Designers are the single largest group of artists, followed by performing artists such as actors, dancers, musicians, and announcers.

Artist occupations, 2003–2005



### 2. The number of artists has kept pace with the growth in the overall labor force.

- After doubling from 1970 to 1990, artists have begun to hold steady as a proportion of American workers (1.4 percent).
- Writers were among the fastest growing artist occupations from 1990 to 2005—growing at twice the rate of the total labor force.





### 3. Artists remain highly concentrated in urban areas.

- Half of all artists live in 30 metropolitan areas.
- More than one-fifth of all U.S. artists live in 5 major metropolitan areas: Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Washington, DC, and Boston.
- But as a percentage of the labor force, artists cluster in a diverse array of towns and cities.

#### Top 10 metropolitan areas ranked by percentage of artists in the labor force

Total artists	
1. San Francisco, CA (PMSA)*	3.71
2. Santa Fe, NM	3.36
3. Los Angeles-Long Beach, CA (PMSA)	3.26
4. New York, NY (PMSA)	3.12
5. Stamford-Norwalk, CT (PMSA)	3.01
6. Boulder-Longmont, CO (PMSA)	2.64
7. Santa Cruz-Watsonville, CA (PMSA)	2.37
8. Danbury, CT (PMSA)	2.28
9. Santa Barbara-Santa Maria-Lompoc, CA	2.25
10. Seattle-Bellevue-Everett, WA (PMSA)	2.16

#### Selected artist occupations: Top 10 metropolitan areas ranked by percentage of artists in the labor force

Musicians		Actors		Writers and authors		Fine artists, art directors, and animators	
1. Nashville, TN	0.65	1. Los Angeles-Long Beach, CA (PMSA)	0.34	1. Santa Fe, NM	0.41	1. Santa Fe, NM	1.12
2. Lawrence, KS	0.31	2. New York, NY (PMSA)	0.17	2. San Francisco, CA (PMSA)	0.39	2. San Francisco, CA (PMSA)	0.55
3. Los Angeles-Long Beach, CA (PMSA)	0.29	3. Medford-Ashland, OR	0.13	3. Boulder-Longmont, CO (PMSA)	0.37	3. Santa Rosa, CA (PMSA)	0.39
4. Bloomington, IN	0.29	4. Orlando, FL	0.08	4. New York, NY (PMSA)	0.36	4. Los Angeles-Long Beach, CA (PMSA)	0.38
5. New York, NY (PMSA)	0.27	5. Wilmington, NC	0.07	5. Bloomington, IN	0.36	5. New York, NY (PMSA)	0.38
6. Sarasota-Bradenton, FL	0.27	6. Ventura, CA (PMSA)	0.07	6. State College, PA	0.32	6. Barnstable-Yarmouth, MA	0.37
7. Hattiesburg, MS	0.26	7. Jersey City, NJ (PMSA)	0.07	7. Los Angeles-Long Beach, CA (PMSA)	0.32	7. Stamford-Norwalk, CT (PMSA)	0.37
8. Myrtle Beach, SC	0.25	8. Stamford-Norwalk, CT (PMSA)	0.06	8. Stamford-Norwalk, CT (PMSA)	0.31	8. Santa Cruz-Watsonville, CA (PMSA)	0.37
9. Trenton, NJ (PMSA)	0.24	9. San Francisco, CA (PMSA)	0.05	9. Missoula, MT	0.30	9. Fort Collins-Loveland, CO	0.36
10. Punta Gorda, FL	0.24	10. Santa Barbara-Santa Maria-Lompoc, CA	0.05	10. Corvallis, OR	0.29	10. San Luis Obispo-Atascadero-Paso Robles, CA	0.35

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Special Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Tabulation.

\*PMSA = Primary metropolitan statistical area, as defined by the federal Office of Management and Budget.



#### 4. The artist population, like the labor force, is becoming more diverse.

- The percentage of non-Hispanic white artists dipped from 86 percent to 80 percent between 1990 and 2005.
- In 2005, Hispanic, Asian, and Native-American artists accounted for nearly 15 percent of all artists—up 6 points from 1990.
- Over a 15-year period, the proportion of African-American artists has remained steady, at 5 percent.

#### 5. Artists are generally more educated than the workforce as a whole.

- Artists are twice as likely as the overall labor force to have graduated from college.
- The proportion of artists with degrees is rising—from 51 percent in 2000 to 55 percent in 2003-2005.
- Architects, writers, and producers show the highest education levels.

	Percentage with a bachelor's degree or higher
Overall labor force	28%
All artists	55%

#### 6. Artists are 3.5 times more likely than other workers to be self-employed.

- More than one in three artists is self-employed, compared with less than 10 percent of the labor force.
- 40 percent of all musicians work in the non-profit sector—far more than any other artist group.

	Percentage self-employed
Overall labor force	10%
All artists	35%

#### 7. Fewer artists have full-year, full-time jobs than other workers.

- One-third of all artists work fewer than 50 weeks a year.
- 28 percent of artists work for less than 35 hours a week.
- Actors have the lowest level of full-year, full-time employment—15 percent.

	Percentage of full-year, full-time workers
Overall labor force	61%
All artists	55%

#### 8. Artists generally earn less than workers with similar levels of education.

- Artists earn \$6,000 less annually than other “professional” workers.
- Dancers have the lowest median annual income—\$15,000.

#### 9. Women remain underrepresented in several artist occupations.

- Four out of five architects and announcers, and almost two-thirds of musicians, producers, and photographers, are men.
- Yet three out of four dancers are women, as are more than half of all designers and writers.



## 10. The West and South have seen the greatest growth in artists by state.

- The West was led by Nevada, Utah, Oregon, and Arizona. In these states, the artist population grew at 2.5 to 5 times the rate of that of the U.S. labor force (11.6 percent) from 1990 to 2000.
- Florida and Georgia led the South with a 23 percent growth in artists—double the national average.
- 29 percent of all artists now live in the West, and another 29 percent in the South.

## Top 10 states ranked by number of artists per 10,000 people

Total artists	
1. New York	101.1
2. California	97.6
3. Massachusetts	91.0
4. Vermont	87.4
5. Colorado	85.4
6. Hawaii	84.1
7. Connecticut	84.0
8. Oregon	80.5
9. Washington	78.8
10. Nevada	77.9

## Selected artist occupations: Top 10 states ranked by number of artists per 10,000 people

Actors	
1. California	5.3
2. New York	4.2
3. Nevada	1.3
4. New Jersey	1.1
5. Florida	1.0
6. Minnesota	0.9
7. Illinois	0.9
8. Utah	0.9
9. Oregon	0.9
10. Connecticut	0.9

Architects	
1. Massachusetts	12.9
2. Colorado	12.7
3. Washington	11.7
4. Vermont	10.7
5. Hawaii	10.3
6. New York	9.3
7. Connecticut	9.1
8. Oregon	9.1
9. Maryland	9.0
10. California	8.5

Fine artists, art directors, and animators	
1. New Mexico	18.1
2. Vermont	16.2
3. Hawaii	14.9
4. Montana	13.0
5. New York	12.6
6. California	12.4
7. Alaska	12.3
8. Maine	12.1
9. Oregon	11.4
10. Colorado	10.9

Dancers and choreographers	
1. Nevada	6.9
2. Hawaii	4.7
3. Alaska	2.0
4. Arizona	1.5
5. Utah	1.4
6. Florida	1.4
7. New York	1.4
8. Nebraska	1.2
9. Texas	1.1
10. Oklahoma	1.1

Designers	
1. Massachusetts	36.9
2. Connecticut	36.5
3. Rhode Island	36.2
4. New York	34.5
5. California	34.1
6. Michigan	32.8
7. Colorado	32.6
8. Minnesota	31.9
9. Oregon	31.6
10. Washington	31.4

Entertainers and performers	
1. Nevada	8.9
2. Florida	3.4
3. Hawaii	2.9
4. California	2.0
5. Arizona	1.8
6. New York	1.5
7. Colorado	1.5
8. Tennessee	1.4
9. Texas	1.3
10. Vermont	1.3

Musicians	
1. Tennessee	11.8
2. Hawaii	10.1
3. Nevada	8.9
4. New York	8.6
5. California	7.8
6. Florida	6.9
7. Massachusetts	6.9
8. New Jersey	6.8
9. Colorado	6.4
10. Minnesota	6.2

Writers and authors	
1. Vermont	11.3
2. New York	10.8
3. Massachusetts	9.8
4. California	9.0
5. Oregon	8.6
6. Connecticut	8.1
7. Colorado	8.1
8. Maine	7.9
9. Maryland	7.7
10. Montana	7.5

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