

# Visual Arts

FutureNow is the Western Australian Training Council for the creative, leisure and technology industries. The Council is a skills advisory body that represents the voice of industry, advising the State Government on the training and workforce development needs of our industry sectors.

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## Current Industry Environment

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As highlighted this year by Ted Snell, Director of the UWA Cultural Precinct, “Visual skills are essential for a sophisticated workforce, yet we offer so little education in the vital skills of learning to see and developing the ability to interpret and critique our image-saturated world... Internships, courses that integrate the arts within other disciplines, and collaborative projects designed for students across discipline areas are just some examples of strategies already employed at universities. That is our challenge, to work collaboratively across academic disciplines to re-imagine the role of the visual arts in the 21st century university.”<sup>1 2</sup>

In every sector, visual communication skills are becoming increasingly essential. Every organisation that has a website needs to consider visual design and in our fast-data culture, infographical content has come to the fore as a succinct way to communicate complex ideas. The burgeoning digital games and animation industries both rely heavily on a visually literate, artistic workforce, and demand from advertising agencies and applications developers for visual communication skills is ever growing. Employers across broader industry seek creativity as a core skill in the emerging knowledge workforce, and the visual arts sector seeks ways to make these aims more concrete and build opportunities for visual artists to work within our new, diversified economy. Implications exist not only in the academic sphere but also for vocational training providers in equipping students with these broad technical and workforce skills.

### Workforce Characteristics

Nationally, the visual arts and crafts sector supports 10,000 workers,<sup>3</sup> and the small-to-medium (\$2M) visual arts sector employs over 2,000 people, puts \$100 million into the economy and produces 26,000 new art works each year.<sup>4</sup> Data around the size of the visual arts workforce is generally considered to be unreliable, owing to visual artists self reporting as working primarily in another field. Annual income for visual artists is on average very low, and consequently visual artists typically supplement their work with other income streams. However, Job Outlook data, which measures only data around workers who reported to the most recent Census as Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals, paints a picture of a more sustainable workforce.

Workers in the sector are primarily female, older than average, and have attained higher than average educational outcomes.<sup>5</sup> This is likely to be reflective of the relative economic stability required to be able to invest in building a visual arts career. Moderate growth is anticipated for the sector, and workers face only average levels of unemployment. Again, this may be because most visual artists do not try to sustain themselves primarily through their visual arts work and are not captured by this data.<sup>6</sup>

Recent Australia Council research suggests that visual artists’ average income is approximately \$48,000 per annum, well below the national average. The gender pay gap is significantly more acute than average in the sector, with female artists earning on average 44% less than their male counterparts for their creative work.<sup>7</sup> No firm data exists to explain the gap, though it is recognised that women have been underrepresented in media and galleries, and are underrepresented in higher income disciplines such as sculpture. Industry have begun to explore strategies to directly address the issue.<sup>8</sup>

# A snapshot of Visual Arts

Visual Arts | Craft | Public Art | Aboriginal Arts | Arts Organisations |



**\$43K**

Visual artists' average annual income is much lower than the national average

The average visual artist in Australia is female, aged 50, and very highly educated.\*

As with other talent-driven industries, **income varies** very widely depending on the reputation of the artist

## Aboriginal Visual Arts

**\$200-300m:** the estimated value of Aboriginal art sales annually\*\*

**820,000:** international tourists engaged with Aboriginal cultural arts in 2017\*\*

**27:** Aboriginal art centres in Western Australia

Growing the **Aboriginal visual arts market** will bring economic and social benefits to remote Indigenous communities across WA

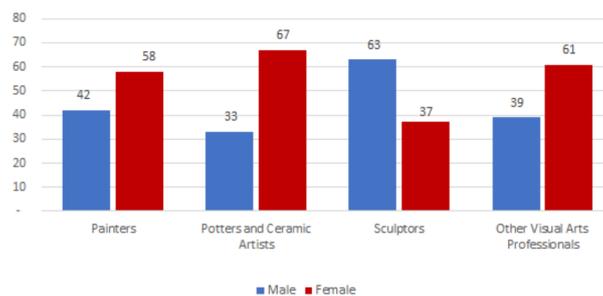
## Women in the Visual Arts

**44%**

Women earn on average 44% less than their male counterparts in the visual arts.\*



Visual Arts Gender Profiles % - Australia\*



References:

\* <https://joboutlook.gov.au/Occupation?search=alpha&code=2114>

\*\* <https://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research/international-arts-tourism-connecting-cultures/>

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## Industry Developments

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### Online marketplace

Websites such as Artsy<sup>9</sup> are remaking the art market and allowing visual artists direct access to a global audience online. These sites house an overwhelming selection of artists' work, and even while the market expands, visibility can diminish as artists become 'lost in the crowd'. A sophisticated understanding and application of social media, data analysis, and audience mapping and development, becomes necessary in order for artists to market themselves in this environment.

Physical commercial galleries and curators are increasingly bypassed by artists who are less reliant on this model for access to market, however as described above, very few visual artists are able to work in the field, with most relying on other forms of employment to support their visual arts work. The undermining of the local sector caused by the shift to online in this context is problematic, since face-to-face networking opportunities are diminished, hampering efforts by emerging local artists to become established and access opportunities. This in turn amplifies the importance of arts organisations in the ecology, as places that build community, provide professional development and promote networking opportunities for practitioners.

### Local opportunities

In the electorate of Perth, 88% of the public have attended a cultural event in the last twelve months, whereas only 36% visited a gallery. There is awareness in industry of the need to meet the public in spaces which do not feel exclusive, and the growth of public art in WA is in part a response to this need.<sup>10</sup> There are opportunities to work in the sphere- largely driven by the Percent for Art Scheme<sup>11</sup> - with local councils emerging as significant consumers of visual arts and employers of arts workers. An increasing number include art programming in their community service delivery, maintain art galleries and collections, and employ the visual arts in place making efforts.

Across the broader economy also, branding and placemaking initiatives are generating opportunities for visual artists. The Adnate Hotel, opened in October 2019, is the first of Accor's Art Series hotels to feature a street artist, and is reflective of Perth's reputation as a street-art hotspot.<sup>12</sup> The trend has extended to private clients, with commissions to produce artworks for the public-facing walls of private residences becoming a growing market for local artists.<sup>13</sup> Brenton See, a graduate of North Metropolitan TAFE's Graphic Design school, is a highly successful example of artists working in this space.<sup>14</sup> These opportunities again highlight the importance of artists' capacity to manage their own marketing and branding, as well as being able to communicate and write strategic proposals, grant applications and acquittals.

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## Workforce Opportunities

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The sector consists almost exclusively of self-employed artists, so sector strategy tends to be directed through peak organisations. There are several arts organisations in Western Australia offering a range of services to the workforce including Australian Museums and Galleries Association WA, FORM, Regional Arts WA, Community Arts Network, Art on the Move, the Aboriginal Arts Centre Hub of WA, and Artsource.

Disability Arts body DADAA<sup>15</sup> works closely with these and other organisations to deliver training and consultation around the embedding of accessibility into artistic work, and the Chamber of Arts and Culture WA supports the broader creative sector with networking opportunities, advocacy and professional development. Given the challenges faced by artists as described above, the sector continues to prioritise career sustainability as a core issue, as well as accessibility to participation in the arts for groups including the gender diverse, regional and remote, aged, indigenous, and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

### Aboriginal Arts Centres

Quantifying the value of Aboriginal visual arts is complex. Aside from the arts' intrinsic beauty and value, social and economic impacts are difficult to measure, but inarguably significant. Estimates of the dollar value of the current

Aboriginal visual arts market vary very widely, however a figure between \$2-300M is generally agreed on as a reasonably modest evaluation.<sup>16</sup>

Art sales have been identified as “the primary or only source of non-government income” for many remote indigenous communities.<sup>17</sup> As well as the broader economic contribution the sector makes to the Australian economy, community goals around economic independence and self determination are advanced by the work and success of the sector.

As recently identified in the Australia Council paper International Arts Tourism: Connecting Cultures, “Over 820,000 international tourists engaged with First Nations arts while in Australia in 2017, an increase of 41% since 2013. Engagement with First Nations arts was higher for international arts tourists who travelled outside capital cities. More than a third of these travellers attended a First Nations arts activity in 2017 (36%), compared to 24% of international arts tourists overall.”<sup>18</sup>

## Skills and Training Strategies

### Mental health

The challenging conditions described above make it difficult for arts workers to achieve sustainability and recognition in their careers, contributing to documented mental health issues in the creative sector. Following the release of a report into mental health in the performing arts by Victoria University in late 2015, Entertainment Assist was established to reduce ‘the shockingly high rates of anxiety, depression, suicide, isolation and other matters associated with working in the Australian entertainment industry.’<sup>19</sup> Workers need access to self-care knowledge, tools and skills, and people managers need a good understanding of the resources available to them as well as the limits of their responsibilities and liabilities. The sector therefore welcomes a project at the national level to review sector needs and address training gaps in the CUA Arts and Culture Training Package. The project acknowledges “there is a need for nationally-accessible training at a vocational level designed for workers and learners to address the mental wellbeing skills gap identified by industry. Implementing proactive training at the vocational level will equip workers with the skills required to perform and sustain a creative career in industry.”<sup>20</sup>

### Changing skills needs

Digital transformation is underpinning the need for visual arts workers to be flexible and adaptable. There is a growing range of digital production methods, for instance in 3D printing or augmented reality, and an associated need for people and collaboration skills. Large scale public works and festival site-specific works, such as 2019 Perth Festival piece Boorna Waangini, require artists to work with a diverse set of stakeholders in order to bring in people with the skills they don’t possess themselves.<sup>21</sup>

Festivals, local councils and other public art commissions are also driving an increasing need for rigorous knowledge around public safety, conservation, intellectual property, business planning, and marketing. Online sales and social media platforms similarly require a consistent approach and broad audience engagement skills including the ability to connect with audiences through the use of narrative.

### Access to training and education

Arts workers in regional galleries and museums, local councils and Aboriginal arts centres all require access to training to support a skill-set that includes marketing, public engagement, curation, conservation and funding. At present no such training is available, however an ongoing review of existing Arts Administration qualifications is an opportunity to develop an appropriate solution to the needs of this workforce.<sup>22</sup> Industry also note an absence of higher education qualifications in curatorial studies in the state.

Remote Aboriginal art centres need skilled workers, artists and managers in order to grow the industry sustainably, and deliver the broad benefits described above. Skills needs include art sales, people management, facilities management, marketing, governance and business management as well as sector specific cultural and community knowledge and exhibition, interpretation, curatorial and conservation skills.<sup>23 24</sup>

Nationally accredited training currently exists, and is being reviewed in 2019-20 for applicability to industry needs. However, to date, a range of barriers have meant that appropriate training has been largely inaccessible to remote communities and arts centre workers and managers living on country and in remote communities. Sector peak body AACHWA (Aboriginal Art Centre Hub WA) is working with the sector, training providers, government and other stakeholders to identify strategies to address this issue.<?>

## Please Get in Touch

FutureNow is continually seeking broad input from stakeholders and representatives in the Western Australian Visual Arts sector. If you would be interested in providing your perspective on this snapshot or related workforce matters for your sector, our Creative Industries Industry Manager would love to hear from you:

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## References

All links accessed 11.11.19

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