Making Sense of Incomes in the Australian Visual Arts and Craft Sector

Discussion Paper
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Visual Arts Work

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In Australia, incomes in the visual arts and craft sectors are not only lower than average across the population, but they are also lower than those in many other artforms (ABS Census Data, Australia Council 2017). This is demonstrably true using available income measures, but to fully understand the economic situation of visual artists, craft practitioners, and arts workers, let alone formulate policy and practice interventions, a complete picture of the make-up of their earnings at any one time and across their life cycle is needed.

Over recent years, visual arts and craft work has diversified, digitised, and internationalised, with career pathways expanding as a result. Additional data, deeper analysis and theorisation is required to provide a clearer understanding and more holistic picture of the sector, one that embraces the multiplicity of creative practices and career lifecycles. A larger and more philosophical issue is that many practices, including those by First Nations artists and culturally and linguistically diverse artists, along with the rise of socially engaged and community arts practices have been overlooked in and misrepresented by existing measures. Empirical research has only captured part of these changes.

We have embarked on a three-year project with the aim to strengthen the sustainability of the Australian visual art industry by proposing practical interventions for arts industry and government policy to improve the economic, social and cultural standing of visual and craft artists and arts workers. To do so, the research brings together economic data on artists and arts workers' careers, alongside new social, policy, and artist led research to address the question of why incomes are declining and what we can do to improve economic conditions in the sector.

The purpose of this paper is to review existing datasets that relate to the incomes of visual artists, craft practitioners, and arts workers in the visual arts and craft sector, and identify important gaps in our knowledge of the work practices in the sector. Our focus is on Australian studies over the past two decades, and we seek to identify consistent themes reported within this research. It sets the scene for our comprehensive survey of incomes in the visual arts and craft sector which launched in the first part of 2022. It is readily apparent from existing surveys that the definition of visual artists and craft practitioners has a significant impact on the data that is collected and the nature of arts practices that are studied and portrayed in research findings.[1] In our survey, and in the broader research project, we leave it to respondents to self-identify as visual artists, craft practitioners and arts workers, and thereby capture the broadest possible range of practices and careers.

A distinctive focus of our research is to explore the ways in which people move between, and combine, roles as artists and arts workers. Arts workers tend not to be studied as a category in themselves but are found across a range of occupational and industry classifications. Arts workers are engaged in the broader visual arts and crafts sector, as ancillary to this sector, for example as picture framers, gallery attendants, arts managers and technicians. In many contexts there is no clear boundary between artists and arts workers,

[1] A note on terminology: Within the project we talk generally about visual artists and craft practitioners The term Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals is reserved for when we refer to the 4-digit ANZSCO Unit Group code 2114, which includes Painter, Potter or Ceramic Artist, Sculptor, Visual Arts and Crafts Professional (nec), and Visual Arts and Crafts Professional (nfd).

as increasingly the language of creatives, cultural practitioners and creative communities is used to describe participation in an expanded arts and cultural sector.

Sources of Data

The data presented in this paper is drawn from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) the Australian Tax Office and two of the more recent surveys in a series conducted by David Throsby and colleagues, in collaboration with the Australia Council (Throsby and Zednik 2010 and Throsby and Petetskaya 2017). The ABS collects data through the five yearly population wide Census of Population and Housing, and its more regular Labour Force Survey based on a smaller sample, both of which provide detailed quantitative data on the activity, labour market status, incomes, age and gender of visual artists and craft practitioners as a distinct category of professionals, namely Visual Artists and Craft Professionals as defined within the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations; a skills based framework which classifies all occupations and jobs in the Australian and New Zealand labour markets. The Australian Tax Office adopts the same occupational classification when it reports data obtained each financial year's tax returns. The Throsby surveys seeks to include a representative sample of "professional practicing artists" across all artforms, and in 2016 interviewed 823 artists including 190 Visual Artists and 88 Craft Practitioners (Throsby and Petetskaya 2017, p. 183). The ABS conducts an annual supplement to its monthly Labour Force Survey, the Multipurpose Household Survey, which focuses on "self-contained topics", one of which is Cultural Activities. These results are reported as the Survey of Participation in Selected Culture Activities Australia, and we present data from the surveys in 2010-2011, 2013-2014 and 2017-2018 that relates to participation in the visual arts and craft activities.

We present not only the data on visual artists and craft practitioners from these sources, but also the limited data on arts workers, as there are significant interdependencies of income and activities between artists and arts workers in the visual arts and craft sector. At present, data on arts workers is only available through aggregating a number of separate occupational classifications in the census that are closely aligned with or ancillary to the work of visual artists and craft practitioners. We seek to identify gaps in current data collection so as to inform our future research. Through our research we aim to be able to produce a more nuanced understanding of the range of arts workers, their work practices and incomes.

Most challenging in understanding the income patterns for artists and arts workers in the visual arts and craft sector is the absence of reliable data on the economic circumstances of Indigenous artists, both in regional and remote areas, as well as in metropolitan areas. While the Census and other surveys request that respondents indicate whether they are of an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait background, it is unlikely that occupational classifications will accommodate the full range of arts and cultural practices that are embedded in, and enacted through collaboration in Indigenous communities.

The focus in this paper is what the available data can tell us about the incomes and characteristics of those engaged in a visual arts or craft practice, and those undertaking other work in the visual arts and craft sector. Other researchers have taken different approaches to describing the working practices of artists. Callus and Cole (2002), for example, construct a typology of visual artists using three overarching categories:

- full-time income earning visual artists characterised by the fact that their income was drawn mainly from sales of their art,
- full-time practicing artists characterised by the fact that they spent the majority of their time producing artwork but obtained the majority of their income from work in art related and non-art related activity, and
- part-time artists, who spent some of their time on their art practice but relied predominantly on income from other sources.

Meanwhile, Cunningham, Higgs et. al. in their publication, *What's Your Other Job: a census analysis of arts employment in Australia* (2010), used the Australian Census of Population and Housing results from 1996, 2001 and 2006. Their work adopted a creative industries approach and looked to identify both occupation and industry of visual artists, disaggregating visual artists occupational data by those that work in the arts sector, the broader creative industries sector, and those employed across other industries (Cunningham, Higgs et. al. 2010, p. 23). Our aim is to build on this work, drawing on our own data collection to better understand the financial situation of visual artists, craft practitioners and arts worker and their varying working arrangements.

Outline

In section one, we review the estimates of the population of visual artists and craft practitioners produced by the set of data sources referred to above. Section two examines income estimates for visual artists and craft practitioners. In section three, we look more closely at the data from the perspective of gender, age, qualifications and employment status, seeking to identify additional characteristics of visual artists and craft practitioners. As flagged above, there is little detailed analysis of the economic circumstances of arts workers and what does exist is discussed in section four, as it raises very particular definitional challenges. Section five presents existing data and research on Indigenous artists and the Indigenous art sector. In our conclusion, we identify the gaps across the data and indicate the areas to which we are giving greater attention to in our survey of the sector, and in our research more generally.

Section one: Defining the Category

A major limitation of existing research into artists' incomes is that each collection of data adopts a different definition of what constitutes a visual artist or craft practitioner. The definition of a visual artist or craft practitioner, if drawn widely so as to include all those who produce visual art or craft in any context, will likely lead to a lower estimate of average earnings, whereas a narrow definition related to visual artists and craft practitioners as professionals, will likely produce a higher estimate.

As Bille (2020) notes, there is no straightforward way of defining an artist (in any artform), in the way that we might identify other professional groupings, which might for example use qualifications or "licence to practice". In practice a mix of objective and subjective criteria have been used by those seeking to define a population of artists. Bille cites Frey and Pommerehne (1989) as an example of the range of criteria that might be adopted:

- the amount of time spent on artistic work;
- the amount of income derived from artistic activities;
- the reputation as an artist among the general public;
- recognition among other artists;
- the quality of the artistic work produced;
- membership of professional artists' groups or associations;
- a professional qualification (education) in the arts; or
- the subjective self-evaluation of being an artist.

(Bille 2020, p. 46–47)

In this section we highlight the different definitions of visual artist and craft practitioners deployed in existing research in Australia and the population estimates that these have produced. This is not an exhaustive survey of definitions, but rather a summary of those definitions that inform data collection at present, which has largely been produced by government agencies and academic researchers, so as to reconcile survey results and make general observations about the characteristics of the Australian visual arts and craft sector.

Visual Artist or Craft Professional as "Main job"

Information on the income of visual artists and craft practitioners is acquired through the Australian Census, which seeks to capture data from the entire Australian population and is administered/delivered by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The Census is conducted every five years and provides a comprehensive snapshot of the nation, counting respondents based on where they were located on the designated Census night. The Census reports on incomes according to the respondent's identification of their "main job" in the collection period. Classification of occupation is determined through the following Census questions: "In the main job held last week, what was the person's occupation?" and "What are the main tasks that the person usually performs in the occupation?". While at first appearing to be a self-nominating process, the census question omits those who did not identify their arts practice as their "main job" in the week before the census. For example, a respondent who was undertaking other paid work in lieu of their art practice in the particular week before the census would not be counted.

This occupational data is then classified using the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO) introduced in 2006. ANZSCO is a skill-based classification for all occupations and jobs in the Australian and New Zealand labour markets. The framework has several hierarchical levels, which are grouped based on similarities in skill sets. The broadest classification level, denoted by a 1-digit code, is referred to as Major Group, followed by Sub-Major Group (2-digit), Minor Group (3-digit), Unit Group (4-digit) and then the most detailed classification of Occupations (6-digit). The 4-digit ANZSCO Unit Group code used by the ABS is that of Visual Arts and Crafts Professional (2114), which includes the 6-digit occupational classifications of Painter (211411), Potter or Ceramic Artist (211412), Sculptor (211413), Visual Arts and Crafts Professional (nec) (211419), and Visual

Arts and Crafts Professional (nfd) (211400) (ABS Cat 1220.0 - ANZSCO -- Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations, 2013, Version 1.3). Table 1 summarises population estimates for visual artists and craft practitioners using the definition of occupations from ANZSCO 6-digit codes.

Table 1: Population of Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals – Census 2006, 2011 and 2016

ANZSCO v2 Classification	2006	2011	2016
211411 Painter (Visual Art)	2,442	2,331	2,064
211412 Potter or Ceramic Artist	651	457	522
211413 Sculptor	629	648	609
211499 Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals nec[1]	2,492	1,875	1,811
211400 Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals nfd[2]	399	500	348
2114 Total Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals[3]	6,613	5,811	5,354

[1]Not elsewhere classified [2]Not further defined [3]Photographers fall into the ANZSCO unit group 2113, which includes the following: Fashion Photographer, Landscape Photographer, News Photographer, Photographic Artist, Portrait Photographer, Sports Photographer, Technical Photographer.

According to the Census, the total number of Visual Arts and Craft Professionals declined over a 10-year period, from 6,613 in 2006 to 5,354 in 2016, a reduction of around 20%. The population decreased in all categories, but most noticeably in the number of Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals (not elsewhere classified [nec]), and in the period between the 2006 and 2011 Census. Given that the ANZSCO framework was first introduced in 2006, one possible explanation may be that in this period the process of occupational classification was refined, and those who had previously not been able to be classified were in 2011 moved into occupational categories which fell outside of the overarching four-digit occupational group of Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals altogether.

Visual Artists and Craft Practitioners - Practicing Professional Artist

The income of artists in Australia has been the subject of a series of surveys undertaken by David Throsby and colleagues, in partnership with the Australia Council, over the past few decades. The definition of artists adopted for these surveys is that of "practicing professional artists who had been active for 3 to 5 years" (Throsby 2003, p. 13 and others), and includes artists who received none, some or all their income from their art. In seeking to define what constitutes a professional artist for the purpose of this research, Throsby et al. sought to establish whether the person is: "working at a level and with a degree of commitment appropriate to the norms for professional recognition in their particular artform" (Throsby and Petetskaya 2017, p. 18).

Table 2: Estimates of the Population of Visual Artists and Crafts Practitioners – Throsby et al

	2009	2016
Visual Artists (includes photographers)	9,000	8,600
Craft Practitioners[1]	3,800	3,000
Visual Artists and Crafts Practitioners	12,800	11,600

Notes: [1]Throsby and Petetskaya made an additional adjustment to Craft Practitioner numbers as it was considered that the Census would have underestimated this category, with practitioners being included in other occupations. Throsby and Zednik 2011, p. 19 and Throsby and Petetskaya 2017, p. 26.

The 2016 survey produced data from 190 visual artists and 88 craft practitioners (Throsby and Petetskaya 2017, p. 183). Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had identified their art practices as their main job in the Census. Responses to this question established that only 58% of visual artists and 56% of craft practitioners would have been captured by the Census question used to classify occupation (Throsby and Petetskaya 2017, p. 22–24). Table 2 contains the estimated population of Visual Artists and Craft Practitioners in 2016 based on Throsby and Petetskaya's adjustments to the Census data, whereby they increased the reported Census figures by a factor derived from these percentages. The 2009 figures are also estimates based in part on membership information provided by professional associations across artforms and reconciling this with occupational classifications in the Census data (Throsby and Zednik 2011, p. 18-19). The Throsby surveys also include photographers, which are not included in the ANZSCO 2114 Visual Arts and Craft Professionals category. As noted in relation to Table 1, the four-digit code 2113 relates to photographers and includes the following: Fashion Photographer, Landscape Photographer, News Photographer, Photographic Artist, Portrait Photographer, Sports Photographer, Technical Photographer and the numbers in each category cannot be disaggregated. This will also contribute to the larger population count as compared to that obtained from the Census data.

Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals – "Usually work the most hours/main job"

The Labour Force Survey, also delivered by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, is designed to provide monthly and quarterly information about labour force activity of Australia's resident civilian population aged 15 and over. Information is obtained from a sample of approximately 50,000 people and the sample weighted to obtain population estimates. The Survey achieves a high response rate of close to 97% and is undertaken through interviews with households conducted by trained ABS interviewers. It could be argued that the Labour Force Survey data provides a more accurate categorisation of occupation than that obtained through the Census, which is only based on the respondent's own identification of their occupation. The monthly survey is focused on employment status, with quarterly information obtained on occupational classifications.

Because the Labour Force Survey relies on a sample, the results of which are then weighted, it is subject to sampling error, which will be higher when the numbers in a population group are smaller. The results will also differ from the Census as the occupation question does not refer to a specific time period (eg, the Census asks the respondent about their employment in the previous week). The questions on occupation in the Labour Force Survey are asked as "The next few questions are about the job or business in which [you/name] *usually* [work/works] the most hours, that is, [your/his/her] main job" and "Did [you/name] work for an employer, or in [your/his/her] own business?".

Table 3: Labour Force Survey 2016 and 2021

	2016	2021
2114 Visual Arts and Craft Professionals	9,700	12,700

Table 3 shows once again that the manner in which the data is collected, and the method used to identify respondents' occupations, will produce very different results. The Labour Force Survey data shows a Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals population number of 9,700 in 2016, compared with the Census figure of 5,354. Of interest is the significant increase in the population figure between 2016 and 2021. There was also a notable increase in the proportion of that total who identified as female, even higher than that observed in the Census data from the same time period.

Paid and Unpaid Involvement in the Visual Arts and Crafts

The surveys so far discussed have focused on visual artists and craft practitioners who identify either as having a professional arts practice, hold a main job as a visual artist or craft practitioner, or as their main occupation based on activity. A far wider portion of the population, however, engages in art practice as part of their working life, as is evident from the ABS publication *Work in Selected Culture and Leisure Activities Australia, 6281.0*. This publication reports on a survey undertaken to determine the level of involvement in culture and leisure activities, being defined as: "A person is classified as having involvement (or work involvement) in a culture and leisure activity if they had any participation, paid or unpaid, in any one of the activities in the survey and some, or all, of that participation was not for the person's own use or for the use of their family or friends (i.e. was not a hobby activity)".

As respondents could nominate more than one cultural activity, the data does not allow for a population estimate to be made, however it is evident from Table 4 that considerably more Australians are actively involved in the visual arts or crafts than is revealed by surveys that focus on professional practice, occupation, main job or main source of income.

Table 4: Participation in Visual Arts and Craft Activity 2010-2011, 2013-2014 and 2017-2018

	2010-2011		2013-2014	2017-2018	
	Total[2]	Earned[3] wage or salary		Total[4]	Received income[5]
Total Visual Art Activities[1]	2,035,000	N/A	2,214,200	2,659,200	191,700,00
Sculpting, painting. Drawing or cartooning	1,443,700	47,700	1,583,300	1,966,200	92,700
Printmaking, screen printing, etching	221,800	16,100	227,600	N/A	N/A
Photography, film-making	899,400	88,600	1,015,700	995,100	117,300
Total Craft Activities[1]	1,916,600	N/A	1,938,500	2,662,900	79,700
Textile crafts, jewellery, paper, wood	1,786,400	33,900	1,808,700	N/A	N/A
Glass, pottery, ceramics, mosaics	294,300	7,900*	293,900	N/A	N/A

Notes and Sources: Participation in Selected Culture Activities Australia ABS Cat 4921.0. [1]The totals cannot be calculated from the components as respondents were counted separately for each type of activity but only once in the total; [2]Table 5, 2010-2011; [3]Table 12, 2010-2011; [4]Table 4, 2017-2018; [5]Table 8, 2017-2018.
*Estimate has a relative standard error of 25% to 50%

The estimated total number of people involved in any visual art activities increased from 2.0 million to 2.6 million between 2010-2011 to 2017-2018 and in craft activities from 1.9 million to 2.6 million over the same period, approximately a 30-33% increase in activity in both categories. In comparison, the total resident population of Australia increased by just 8% over the same period. Of this group, a significant number reported making income from their arts activity. In 2016, for example, 191,700 people reported income from their visual art activities, while 79,700 made income from craft activities. These numbers are far greater than any other estimate of the population of visual arts and craft practitioners using occupational and employment-based definitions.

Comparing the data on populations of visual arts and craft practitioners

The various estimates of the population of visual artists and craft practitioners, derived from using different definitions of the level of engagement in art practice, are summarized in Table 5. Here we see the highest numbers recorded when asking about involvement in visual art and craft activities in the ABS survey of work in culture and leisure activities, with lower figures from both the Labour Force Survey (based on main occupation as determined by interviewer) and Census data (based on identification by respondents as their main job at the time of the Census). The results achieved through the Throsby surveys can be found in the middle. The 2021 Labour Force Survey figure of 12,675 aligns closely with the two most recent Throsby survey results of 12,800 in 2009 and 11,600 in 2016.

Table 5: Summary of estimates of population of visual arts and craft practitioners

	2006	2009	2011	2016	2017	2021
ABS Census - Visual Arts and Crafts Professional	6,610		5,811	5 354		
Throsby estimates of Professional Visual Arts and Craft Practitioners		12,800		11,600		
Involved in Visual Arts Activity			2,035,000		2,659,200	
Labour Force Survey - Visual Arts and Crafts Professional[1]			6,750	8,500		12,675

Notes:[1]Annual average calculated by authors from quarterly data

As noted previously, the Census data shows a reduction in the number of visual arts and crafts professionals over the period 2006 to 2016, and a decline is also observed in the Throsby estimates of the total of Visual Arts and Crafts Practitioners. On the other hand, the Labour Force Survey shows increasing numbers, as do the figures based on participation in arts and craft activities. While it is difficult to reconcile these results, one possible contributor is the likelihood that respondents to the Labour Force Survey may primarily identify as Visual Artists and Craft Practitioners when talking about their usual occupation, but may not necessarily have worked the greatest number of hours in that occupation in the previous week, as required by the Census question. The Labour Force data might also include more hybrid art practices or community arts practices.

We are not necessarily looking at reconciling this data but rather exploring what these variations might tell us about the characteristics of visual arts and craft practitioners and to identify areas for more focused research. The variations across the data may to some extent reflect Callus and Cole's (2002) typology of visual artists, which distinguished between full-time income earning visual artists, full-time practicing artists, and part-time artists, who spent some of their time on their art practice but relied predominantly on income from other sources. Any one artist might cycle through these different typologies throughout their career, and through a range of other income producing activity – some as arts workers, and some in completely different sectors. We anticipate that through our survey and follow up interviews we will gain a greater understanding of what influences this time allocation on the part of visual artist or craft practitioner, and their options in terms of other income sources.

Section two: Characteristics of Income

In this section, we summarise the state of knowledge about incomes of visual artists and craft practitioners based on data drawn from the sources above. The amounts are shown in 2021-dollar values. Just as the definitions used to categorise visual arts and craft practitioners vary, so does the reporting of income. In the case of the Census, income relates to the total earnings of the respondent (which may include non-art income, for example), whereas the Throsby surveys report income across three categories: (1) according to that received in the respondent's primary artistic occupation, (2) from all their creative activity and (3) their total income including income from non-arts activities.

The data in Table 6 is drawn directly from the Census data across the years 2006-2016 and provides an opportunity to compare the employment profile and income of Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals with that of Arts Professionals in general and those in the more general Professional category of the workforce. The income reported in the census relates to income from all sources. The figures in the Table relate to the income from all sources, presented according to the categorisation of the occupation undertaken as the main job of the respondent at the time of the Census. It is not possible to report these figures as if they were the earnings from a visual arts and craft practice.

Table 6: Census earnings data (2006, 2011 and 2016)

	Number	Mean income ($2021)	Median income ($2021)	% Self-Employed	Avg hours	% <34 hours	% 35+ hours
Census 2006							
Visual Arts & Crafts Professionals	6,610	37,541	26,572	67.5	32	51.4	48.6
Arts Professionals	29,093	46,615	36,419	57.1	30	54.7	45.3
Professionals	1,806,017	93,846	78,148	15.2	37	29.8	70.2
Census 2011							
Visual Arts & Crafts Professionals	5,810	37,173	26,764	71.4	31	52.1	47.9
Arts Professionals	30,951	46,814	36,870	60.2	28	57.1	42.9
Professionals	2,145,442	96,352	82,636	14.0	35	30.9	69.1
Census 2016							
Visual Arts & Crafts Professionals	5,355	39,790	28,947	71.9	30	52.3	47.7
Arts Professionals	33,530	47,686	36,841	63.2	27	59.5	40.5
Professionals	2,370,967	99,713	84,994	13.9	34	31.5	68.5

These income figures show no increase of income in real terms of Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals between the 2006 and 2011 Census, with a mean income of around $37,000 and a median of $26,500. These levels rose to a mean income of $39,790 and a median income of $28,947 being recorded in the 2016 Census. The disparity in each Census between the mean and the median income is one that is observed across the population more generally with median income less influenced by high incomes at the very top end of the scale. Both the mean and median income of Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals is less than those of Arts Professionals in total and significantly less than mean and median incomes of

Professionals more generally. At the same time the average hours worked by Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals is consistently higher than that of all Arts Professionals, but lower than the average hours worked by Professionals in total. Of note is the high percentage of Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals who identified as self-employed, 72% in the 2016 Census, above that for all Arts Professionals and well above the rate of all Professionals.

The Throsby surveys provide a record of the incomes of visual artists, and a breakdown of these incomes across three key areas: creative income in their principal artistic occupation, income from all arts related activity, and total income including from activities outside of the arts. These results appear in Table 7. Care needs to be taken in relying on these results as only 80% of respondents across all artforms completed the income section of the survey, suggesting that among Visual Artists, approximately 152 provided this income data. Using the most recent Throsby and Petetskaya (2017) survey results we see that in the year 2014-2015 the mean income of visual artists from their principal artistic occupation was $20,075 and the median income was $5,767. Similar results were reported for craft practitioners: a mean income of $20,408 and a median of $7,764 ($2021 values). The difference between the income derived from the principal artistic occupation and the total income received by both visual artists and craft practitioners is significant: in both cases less than half of their income was derived from their principal artistic occupation. The mean and median incomes of visual artists remained consistent across the seven-year period, with an apparent significant decline in the income of craft practitioners over the same time. Again, the sample size is very small and likely to be influenced significantly by the composition of the respondents to the survey.

Table 7: Throsby et al. Visual Artists' and Craft Practitioners' Income (2007-08 and 2014-2015)

	2007-2008 ($2021)				2014-2015 ($2021)			
	Visual artists		Craft Practitioners		Visual Arts		Craft Practitioners	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
Creative income (in principal artistic occupation)	20,741	6,100	29,946	13,642	20,075	5,767	20,408	7,764
Creative and other arts related income	31,388	13,642	40,483	24,512	31,832	13,309	38,043	27,174
Total (inc non-arts related income)	47,471	35,048	52,018	41,481	52,129	38,154	47,914	45,474

Source: Throsby and Petetskaya (2017: 74) 662 out of 823 respondents completed the income data; which if apply same ratio of visual artists to whole survey would be approximately 152 visual artists.

The ATO income data for Visual Artists and Craft Professionals for the 2015-2016 financial year appears in Table 8. Like the Census data the ATO data relates to total income from all sources, presented according to the occupational code for the activity that produced the greatest amount of income.

The mean total income for Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals in this ATO income data is significantly less than that of all Professionals. However, unlike the Census data, it exceeds that of all Arts Professionals. This may be as a result of a considerable number of Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals not earning sufficient annual income from all income sources to be required to lodge a tax return, with the tax-free threshold currently $18,000; which means that the sample in the ATO survey includes a higher number of artists earning greater income. This contention is supported by the differing population numbers across the ATO and Census data. While it is not a direct comparison in the same year, the 2016 census reported 5,355 Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals, whereas in 2018-19 the Australian Tax Office reported 2,810 Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals in its data – similarly suggesting that the ATO data is under-representing the population of artists due to the income threshold for lodging a tax return.

Table 8: ATO Income data 2018-2019 ($2021)

	Number	Avg total income $2021	Median income $2021	Average salary or wage income $2021	Median salary or wage income $2021	self-employed (%)[3]
2114 Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals	2,810	50,538	41,683	42,019	34,155	37.4
Arts Professionals[1]	27,755	52,172	41,683	36,637	29,729	41.1
Professionals[2]	2,595,924	96,760	82,163	86,698	82,527	7.7

Source: *https://www.ato.gov.au/about-ato/research-and-statistics/tax-and-superannuation-statistics/*
1. Includes ANZSCO codes: 2111 Actor, dancer or other entertainer; 2112 Music professional; 2113 Photographer and 2114 Visual arts and crafts professional. 2. Includes ANZSCO Major Group 2. 3. Defined using Total Business income number.

Of interest is the fact that the average total income reported in both the ATO data and the Throsby data is in a similar range. The tax office data is reported according to the occupation in which the taxpayer receives the greatest income and the Throsby data includes "professional Visual Artists" and "professional Craft Practitioners", which might arguably explain this correlation. On the other hand, this may merely be coincidental, given the differing sample sizes between the two data sets.

Section three: Gender, Self-Employment, Age, and Qualifications

In this section, we explore other characteristics of the population of visual artists and craft practitioners that is apparent in the various data sets so far discussed. Some of these characteristics may contribute to an explanation of income disparities, and while we are cautious in asserting causalities, reporting on these characteristics will help to inform future research directions.

Gender

Firstly, it is important to note that across the various data we have examined, the collection and analysis of data on Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals tends to be based on a gender binary which prevents a broader understanding of the experiences of non-binary or transgender artists. Given that the visual arts and crafts and specific artforms are strongly gendered, and that gender plays a significant role in career progression, there is a need for a more nuanced analysis that includes other genders. As with the other themes we have discussed in this paper, the percentage of female and male visual artists and craft practitioners varies according to the artform and the definition of artist used in various forms of data collection.

Once again, the most comprehensive data on the make-up of the population of visual arts and crafts professionals can be found in the Census data. Table 9 summarises the percentage of Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals at the six-digit occupational code who are recorded as female in the past three Census collections.

Table 9: Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals by Gender - Census 2006, 2011 and 2016

ANZSCO v2 Classification	2006	2011	2016
	Females (%)	Females (%)	Females (%)
211411 Painter (Visual Art)	56	57	58
211412 Potter or Ceramic Artist	60	64	67
211413 Sculptor	32	40	36
211499 Visual Arts and Crafts Professional nec[1]	58	61	61
211400 Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals nfd[2]	55	53	58
2114 Total Visual Arts and Crafts Professional[3]	55	57	57

[1]Not elsewhere classified [2]Not further defined [3]Photographers have not been included as the ANZSCO unit group 2113 includes the following: Fashion Photographer, Landscape Photographer, News Photographer, Photographic Artist, Portrait Photographer, Sports Photographer, Technical Photographer and the numbers in each category cannot be disaggregated

The Census data consistently shows a majority of females in the aggregate category of Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals, increasing modestly from 55% to 57% over the 10 years from 2006 to 2016. The highest percentage of females is reported among potters and ceramic artists, 67% in 2016, and the lowest is among sculptors, at 36% in 2016. In both cases this represents an increase over the 10-year period.

The Labour Force data confirms this increase in the proportion of females among Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals, from an average of 57.8% in the period 2006 to 2013, to 63.6% in the period 2014:1 to 2021:4[2]. The latest Throsby data likewise reports a majority of females in the Visual Arts of 54% and among Craft Practitioners of 58% (Throsby and Petetskaya 2017: 29). The Australian Tax Office data records a lower percentage of female Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals, 47% for the year 2018-19. In our analysis, this discrepancy likely reflects the fact that the Tax Office data does not capture numbers of women whose total income is less than the tax-free threshold of $18,000 per year.

The ATO data for the 2018-2019 tax year in Table 10 shows that female Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals receive less income than their male counterparts across most categories, the exception being potters and ceramicists, where the average income of females exceeds that of males, but the median income is less, though not by as significant a margin as is the case with painters and sculptors. Overall, the median income for female Visual Arts and Craft Professionals was 66% of that of earned by males: $31,168 compared with $46,908.

Table 10: (unadjusted) Gender Income Gap ATO Data 2018-2019

Occupation	Female Avg income	Male avg income	F/M	Female median income	Male median income	F/M
211400 Artist - nfd	14,421	13,872	104%	15,524	15,402	101%
211411 Artist - Painter	31,499	42,388	74%	24,843	36,101	69%
211412 Artist - Potter or Ceramic	40,873	39,579	103%	29,893	35,406	84%
211413 Artist - sculptor	37,538	51,460	73%	31,906	46,354	69%
211499 Artist - nec	43,567	61,990	70%	35,668	55,915	64%
2114 Visual Arts & Craft Professionals	38,144	53,375	71%	31,168	46,908	66%

Similar income disparities are found in the census data in Table 11. Income by gender is not available at the six-digit level from the Census, so the following discussion relates to the four-digit category of Visual Arts and Craft Professional. The 2016 census recorded a median income for female Visual Arts and Craft Professionals from all sources of $22,616 compared with that of male Visual Arts and Craft Professionals of $33,425, female median income being 68% of that of males. The mean total income for females being 76% of that for males.

[2] Calculations from Labour Force, Australia, Detailed EQ08 - Employed persons by Occupation unit group of main job (ANZSCO), Sex, State and Territory, August 1986 onwards

Table 11: Gender Income Gap Visual Arts and Craft Professionals, Census 2006, 2011 and 2016

Visual Arts and Craft Professionals	Female Mean	Male Mean	F/M	Female Median	Male Median	F/M
2016	32,398	42,748	76%	22,616	33,425	68%
2011	26,189	37,162	70%	18,770	28,827	65%
2006	22,750	31,968	71%	15,911	24,349	65%

While the Throsby data is not broken down by gender for specific artforms, it does present income data at the level of creative income in the respondents' principal artistic occupation, as opposed to total income which is the measure reported by the ABS and the Australian Tax Office. According to the Throsby data in Table 12, the mean income received by females in their principal artistic occupation is 70% of that received by males. For median incomes from their principal artistic occupation, this declines to 49%. The median reflects the mid-point of the range of incomes, whereas the mean is distorted by outliers, often at the higher end of the income range.

Table 12: Throsby data gender income gap 2014-2015

All Artists	Female Mean	Male Mean	F/M	Female Median	Male Median	F/M
Creative income (in principal artistic occupation)	15,400	22,100	70%	4,400	9,000	49%
Creative and other arts related income	29,400	36,000	82%	15,100	16,500	92%
Total (inc non-arts related income)	41,600	55,100	75%	36,000	50,000	72%

As the Tax Office and Census data shows income from all sources it is therefore not possible to say with any certainty that the income received from art practice alone follows the same pattern in terms of the gender income gap.

It is material to note the number of hours allocated to art practice when considering income received. Table 13 shows that on average, male Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals work more hours in all jobs per week than do female Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals. This differential is observed across the workforce more generally, reflecting the fact that women undertake greater childcare responsibilities and unpaid domestic work than men, and occupational segmentation with female dominated areas of work having more part-time work opportunities (Doan 2021, Landivar 2015, Rose et al 2011).

Table 13: Visual Arts and Craft Professionals: Female and Male hours of work

	Census Year	Average hours	< 35	35+
Females	2006	28	63.7	36.3
	2011	27	62.3	37.7
	2016	27	61.9	38.1
Males	2006	37	37.0	63.0
	2011	34	38.7	61.3
	2016	34	39.0	61.0

NB: Hours is defined as hours worked in *all* jobs week prior to Census.

Self-Employment

So far, we have determined that visual arts and craft practitioners have a higher proportion identifying as female and that they earn a total income less than professionals in the workforce more generally. A further characteristic of the nature of work undertaken by visual artists and craft practitioners appears in the data, and that is the high level of those who report being self-employed. The census data contained in Table 14 indicates that for those whose occupation in their main job is that of Visual Arts and Crafts Professional, 72% were self-employed in the 2016 census, up from 67.5% in 2006. A slightly lower percentage of all Arts Professionals are self-employed, 63.2% in 2016. These figures are considerably higher than that reported for all Professionals which was 13.9% in 2016, a figure that had declined since 2006 when 15.2% of all Professionals reported being self-employed.

Table 14: Self-employment rates in Census

	2006	2011	2016
Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals	67.5%	71.4%	71.9%
Arts Professionals	57.1%	60.2%	63.2%
All Professionals	15.2%	14.0%	13.9%

The most recent Labour Force Survey data indicates a further increase in the proportion of Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals who reported being self-employed: 85.5% in 2021.[3] The Australian Tax Office data also records higher than average rates of self-employment amongst Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals: 37.4% in 2018-19, though substantially lower than that reported in the Census and Labour Force Survey data, likely influenced by the fact that Tax Office data will exclude significant numbers of self-employed Visual Arts and Crafts Professionals whose total income is under the tax-free threshold, and who may not therefore file a tax return.

[3] Calculations from Labour Force, Australia, Detailed EQ08 - Employed persons by Occupation unit group of main job (ANZSCO, Sex, State and Territory, August 1986 onwards

The high levels of self-employment among Visual Arts and Craft Professionals recorded in the Census warrants greater attention and additional research. The term self-employed captures a wide variety of arrangements and, in the case of visual artists and craft practitioners, is likely to include significant numbers of sole traders – such as artists producing art for sale, artists working on commission, and artists undertaking short term project related contracts. The insecurity associated with self-employment is known to contribute to income insecurity and can be detrimental to health. Our data collection, and interviews, will further explore the nature of self-employment in the visual arts and craft sector, enabling a better understanding of what constitutes self-employment among visual artists, craft practitioners and arts workers.

Age and Qualifications

The final set of characteristics for which data exists at a population level for Visual Art and Craft Professionals is that of age and qualifications. The Census data in Table 15 shows the high and increasing levels of post-school level education undertaken by Visual Arts and Craft Professionals; in 2016 71% reported having undertaken Post-School Education of any type, compared with 56% across the general Australian population aged 15 years and over.

As can be seen from the Table artists are consistently older than the rest of the workforce. Additionally, the concentration of artists who are considered professional sits in an older age bracket. Throsby argues that the reasons for the age difference of Visual Arts and Craft Professionals in comparison to the rest of the labour force relates to the amount of time that it takes for an artist to be considered professional, and that artists generally tend to have longer and more varied careers.

Table 15: Age and Education level of Visual Arts and Craft Professionals (Census Data)

	2006	2011	2016
Average Age of Visual Arts and Craft Professionals	47	49	49
% aged less than 50	70%	64.1%	61.6%
% aged 50 and over	30%	35.9%	38.4
Average age of Arts Professionals	41	41	41
Average Age of All Professionals	39	41	42
% of Visual Art and Craft Professionals with Post-School Education	63%	68%	71%

Source: ABS census data derived by authors using Table Builder

While the total number of respondents to the Throsby surveys are modest, as noted above, the results are consistent with the Census data and it does appear that the visual arts and craft sector is ageing. In 2002, 25% of visual artists and 20% of craft practitioners surveyed by Throsby were aged 55 and over, whereas in 2016 this cohort accounted for 46% of all visual artists and 58% of craft practitioners (Throsby and Petetskaya 2017, p. 161).

Section four: Arts Workers in the Visual Arts and Craft Sector

Arts workers constitute a significant proportion of the visual art and craft sector workforce; and yet data on their incomes and careers is extremely limited. Many of those engaged in the visual arts and craft sector undertake several different roles, visual artists and craft practitioners will also be arts workers, and many arts workers will also maintain an arts practice. There is little focused research on the economic conditions of arts workers in the visual arts and craft sector, and the classification of occupations in existing data sets poses challenges for understanding arts workers as a category. While individual occupations are listed in the ANZSCO classification scheme, each six-digit level code brings together a number of discrete occupations, not all of which might be considered within a definition of an arts worker in the visual arts and craft sector. For example, the 272611 code includes community arts officer, community arts worker, community cultural development officer, and community artist - but it is not possible to separate out data for any one of these individual occupations. Similarly, the 392111 code includes print finisher, but also includes mailhouse operator and paper guillotine operator (bookbinding). In this section, a number of occupational categories have been drawn upon in an attempt to identify the characteristics of arts workers.

Table 16 presents ATO data for the best estimate of the range of six-digit codes that would constitute arts workers in the visual arts and craft sector. As we can see from the Table, 55.2% of arts workers are female, and the area has a high level of gender segmentation. The areas of arts administration, archives, curatorship, conservation, teaching, community arts and gallery attendants and guides are female dominated, while museum technicians, picture framers, printers, book binders and print finishers are male dominated areas of employment.

Table 16: Arts worker Income ATO data 2015-2016

Occupation	% Female	Number of individuals	Average taxable income $	Median taxable income $
139911 Administrator - arts; Arts administrator; Arts manager; Manager – arts	74.90	3,721	59,848	53,387
224211 Archivist	68.47	885	62,748	62,221
224212 Curator - gallery or museum; Gallery curator; Museum curator	69.86	1,211	66,957	61,689
234911 Conservator;	64.61	421	55,452	55,466
249211 Art teacher - private; Teacher - art – private	78.39	1,365	46,394	37,000
272611 Community arts worker	73.46	407	42,339	36,594
392111 Book binder; Print finisher	33.41	2,323	49,486	48,328
392112 Printer - screen; Screen printer	13.86	2,056	54,578	50,225

394212 Picture framer	32.58	801	37,463	36,249
399311 Technician - museum or gallery; Gallery technician; Museum technician;	42.89	380	46,287	45,496
451411 Attendant - gallery; Attendant - museum; Gallery or museum guide; Guide - gallery or museum; Museum or gallery guide	67.86	974	38,479	34,817
Total	55.20	14,544	53,318	50,225

Average taxable income in a number of occupations, and on average in the sector, exceed those of Visual Arts and Craft Professionals. The capacity of visual artists and craft practitioners to earn more money as arts workers, than as artists, may influence their decision-making about how they allocate their time, with the capacity to subsidise their art making through other employment in the visual arts and craft sector.

Section five: Indigenous artists and arts centres

As outlined in the introduction, quantitative data collection in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is subject to many more variables than that of the population as a whole. In this section we bring together available data from the ABS and estimates provided by other sources. Tables 17 and 18 provide data on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders Visual Arts and Craft Professionals recorded in the Census of Population and Housing 2006, 2011 and 2016. The census has recorded significant growth in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population over the past three census cycles. As a percentage of the population counted in the census Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders represented 2.3% in 2006, 2.5% in 2011 and 2.8% in 2016 (ABS). Over the same years the number of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Visual Artists and Craft Professionals recorded in the Census has declined significantly – from 653 in 2006 to 250 in 2016. We have discussed the limitations in the attribution of occupational classifications within the census, in that it excludes those who are not engaged in art making in that week, which reduces the number. This is likely to be more profound when asked of Indigenous respondents. However, this is unlikely to explain the relatively low numbers, let alone the reduction in numbers over time, data that is inconsistent with more specific reports on Indigenous art activity (outlined below). We also noted that the number of Visual Artists and Craft Professionals in the general population declined over this period according to Census data, but not to the same extent.

Table 17: Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Visual Artists and Craft Professionals 2006, 2011 and 2016

	Number	Mean income ($2021)	Median income ($2021)	%Female	%Self-Employed
Census 2006					
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	653	20,442	15,927	67.1	11.2
Non-Indigenous	5,886	39,039	26,669		
Census 2011					
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	477	22,435	17,603	63.9	20.5
Non-Indigenous	5,293	37,849	28,175		
Census 2016					
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	250	25,017	16,988	58.4	31.6
Non-Indigenous	5,355	40,464	29,627		

Note: the sums do not necessarily equal the totals given in Table 6 due to the "Not Stated' option for Indigenous status.

Table 18: Age & Education ATSI Visual Arts and Craft Professionals 2006, 2011 and 2016

	2006	2011	2016
Average Age of Visual Arts and Craft Professionals	40	45	45
% aged less than 50	72.6%	65.8%	60.9%
% aged greater than 50	27.4%	34.2%	39.1%
% of Visual Art and Craft Professionals with Post-School Education	20.4%	21.4%	33.6%

In other respects, the characteristics of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Visual Artists and Craft Professionals are similar to those of the entire occupational classification: females are in the majority and a significant number are self-employed.

The true number of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander artists, craft artists and arts workers is likely much higher than the Census data reports. A study of art and craft centres in 1997, for example, estimated that there were 5,000–6,000 Indigenous artists (CDCITA 2002). Report of the Contemporary Visual Arts and Craft Inquiry 2002, p. 32). More recently, in 2020 it was estimated that approximately 8,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual artists and more than 500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts workers[4] were engaged through the Australian Government's Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support, which funds around 80 Indigenous art centres and provides support to Indigenous art fairs and to

[4] This use of the term "arts worker" differs from that we use in our research.

Indigenous arts service organisations supporting Indigenous artists and art centres (DITRDC, 2020, p. 5-6). Specific reports focus on the Indigenous art sector and Indigenous art centres as discrete systems within and alongside the visual arts and craft sector (The Senate, 2007; Woodhead and Acker 2014).

In 2006 the ABS released Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians: Involvement in Arts and Culture, a report which drew on a range of data from the 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, the 2002 General Social Survey, and the 2001 Census of Population and Housing. This publication makes a distinction between the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Indigenous arts and culture and involvement in arts related activities more generally. The 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey recorded a 27% participation rate in Indigenous creative arts activities, with a slightly higher rate among women (30%) than men (25%), and that those in remote areas were more likely to receive payment for this participation than those in the non-remote areas: 12% in remote areas and 6% in non-remote areas. The data on participation rates for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is now well out of date, but the report highlights the different experiences of those in remote areas as compared with non-remote areas, gender differentials and the importance of adopting a nuanced approach to an analysis of art-making among the Indigenous population.

Conclusions, Challenges and Future Work

The data discussed in this paper gives a high-level view of existing data on the characteristics of visual artists and craft practitioners, and to a lesser extent of arts workers in the Australian arts and craft sector. Estimates of the population of those who identity as a visual artist or craft practitioner vary considerably depending on the definitions adopted, with a common distinction being based on whether the practice is “professional”, or their “main job”. There are much larger numbers of people engaging in visual arts and crafts activities more broadly, and generating income from these activities, without meeting the professional definitions of the Census, ATO and Throsby data sets.

The numbers of professional visual artists and craft practitioners appears to be declining – based on the census data and Throsby surveys, although the Labour Force Survey provides a contrary view. The average age of visual artists and craft practitioners is increasing, as is the percentage with a post-secondary education. In contrast to the view that careers as professional artists are declining, engagement in visual arts and craft activities as part of working life has increased and significant numbers undertake a range of practices and activities. What this tells us is that many visual artists and craft practitioners earn income from a variety of sources – not solely from their art practice. A much higher proportion of visual artists and craft practitioners are self-employed than is the case across the labour force as a whole.

Concerningly, Visual Arts and Craft Professionals earn less than Arts Professionals in general and significantly less than Professionals generally. We also know that there are large numbers of those engaged in visual arts and craft activities who earn no money from their practice. The sector is gender segmented with most areas of practice being female dominated; the exception being sculptors. At the same time, female visual artists and craft practitioners earn on average less total income than do their male counterparts.

Future Directions

This paper sits within a larger research project, the purpose of which is to shed light on the economic status and career life cycles of visual artists, craft practitioners, and arts workers, and to propose policy and industry interventions. We are particularly interested in the interaction between artistic practices, arts work and other activity in the visual arts and craft sector and beyond. In this way we hope to illuminate the interdependencies between the visual arts and craft sector, visual art and craft production and the well-being of artists and arts workers.

Informed by the important prior work and data sets outlined in this paper, we are now undertaking a significant survey of the population of visual arts and arts workers, extending well beyond the scope of previous work. Unlike other surveys discussed in this paper, we have chosen to adopt an inclusive approach relying on self-definition on the part of the survey participant. We hope that by undertaking this approach we will come to a better understanding of the ways in which visual artists, craft practitioners and arts workers may occupy a number of professional identities in the course of their interaction with the arts and cultural sector, and in undertaking arts related activity elsewhere. By encouraging respondents to identify both as visual artists and/or craft practitioners and as arts workers as appropriate, we also seek to illuminate the interdependency of these activities within the visual sector and beyond.

The survey will also allow us to address the limited gender analysis revealed by existing research. There are indications of gender segmentation in the sector, and disparities in income along gender lines. By including an opportunity for non-binary respondents to be identified in the survey, and by conducting follow up interviews, we hope to be able to report in a more nuanced fashion on the role that gender plays in the economic circumstances and life cycles of visual artists, craft practitioners and arts workers. Likewise, the experiences of artists from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds will be illuminated through the survey and the interviews. In addition to the survey and interviews the project will undertake Indigenous led consultation in collaboration with NAVA and Terri Janke and Co. so as to engage more fully with the diversity of practices in the Indigenous arts sector and craft sector, and develop an expanded approach to cultural value chains to enable broader and more inclusive understanding of incomes and career life cycles in the visual arts sector, leading to both policy and practice recommendations and interventions.

As we come to understand the multiple sources of income on which artists and producers in the visual arts and craft sector rely, we will be better equipped to adopt a program of sector wide interventions that will both directly and indirectly support practice and financial circumstances of visual artists, craft practitioners and arts workers. This will enable us to better illuminate the nuances within the visual arts, the conditions of which vary from broader arts and cultural sector analysis. The interdependencies between visual art and craft practice and other work in the visual arts and craft sector will be captured by explicitly including arts workers in this survey.

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