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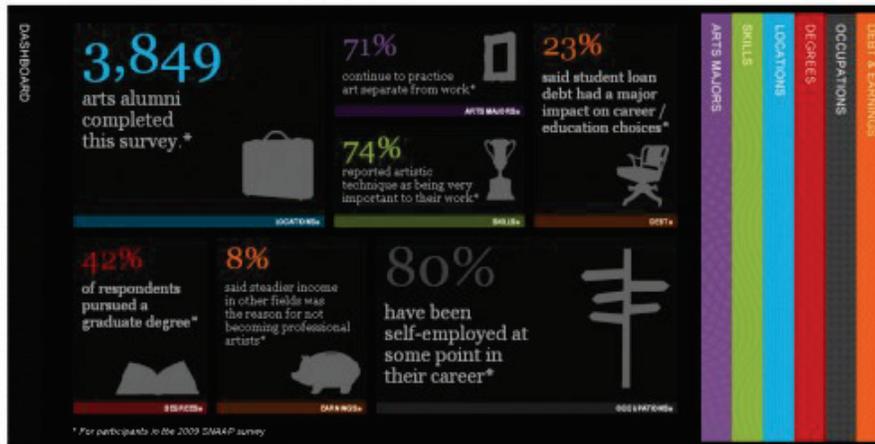
Portrait of the Artists as a Scrupy, Fulfilled Demographic

March 16, 2011, 4:42 pm (blog post)



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By Carolyn Mooney

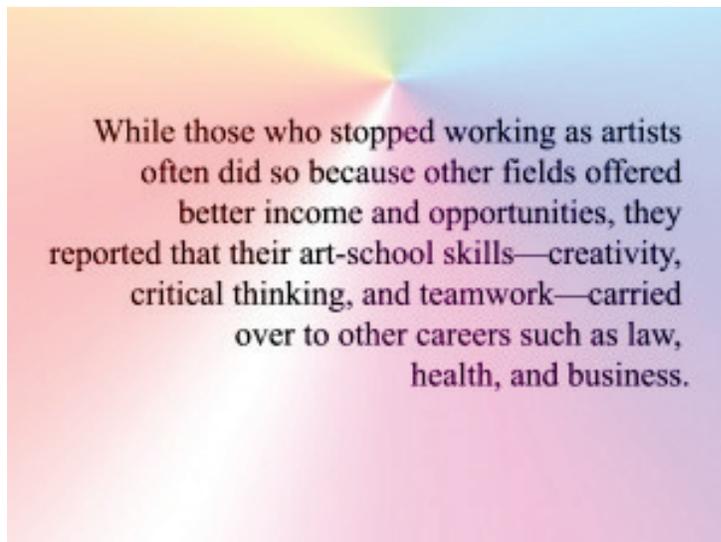
The struggling artist lives on, but has built a satisfying career in some unexpected ways. He or she is far more likely to be self-employed, juggling several jobs at a time, or teaching in an arts field than wasting away in a garret.

That's part of the snapshot that has developed so far from an ongoing national survey of arts alumni designed to provide data on the development of artists.

A majority of art-school graduates continue to work as professional artists, early data from the [Strategic National Arts Alumni Project](#) (Snaap) show. And while those who stopped working as artists often did so because other fields offered better income and opportunities, they reported that their art-school skills—creativity, critical thinking, and teamwork—carried over to other careers such as law, health, and business. Many former artists remained active in their communities, and were far more likely to support the arts by donating time and money than were non-artists.

“I think the story is, you don’t have a bunch of bitter graduates who wish they hadn’t gone to art school,” says Steven J. Tepper, associate director of [Vanderbilt University’s Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy](#). “You’ve got people who are working in their chosen profession.”

The online project is run by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research in collaboration with the Curb Center. It’s modeled after the National Survey of Student Engagement, which collects data on student involvement in academics and is also administered by the Indiana center. Since 2008, when the project began three years of field testing, 20,000 arts alumni at some 250 institutions have taken part in the survey. About 10 percent are secondary arts schools; the rest include art institutes, conservatories, and arts-related departments at colleges.



Tepper believes the data will help arts educators make the case that the arts add value, especially at a time when the creative economy is on the rise. “We need to know what our arts graduates are doing,” he says. “As tuition rises and accreditors become more demanding, that’s an important question.”

The survey data so far have also pointed out some shortcomings in arts education. A large majority of artists reported being

self-employed at some point in their career, something their training did not prepare them for. And a substantial number also hold jobs outside of the arts.

“We want faculties to be debating what skills artists need to become entrepreneurs,” Tepper says. “In fact, artists are classic entrepreneurs.”

Findings from the 2010 survey will be available later this spring, and are expected to provide the most comprehensive national picture yet of art graduates’ career paths. Some 150 institutions representing 250 arts programs took part in that survey. In the meantime, here are some findings from the 2009 survey, based on a smaller data sample from 54 institutions:

- Some 59 percent of alumni were currently working as professional artists; 17 percent had done so in the past; and one-fourth never had.

- More than one-third of current professional artists simultaneously held jobs in three or more types of occupations.
- Salaries varied widely by field. Those employed in architecture, arts education, and design reported median income of \$50,000, compared with \$35,000 for those working in theater, arts administration, and dance.
- Just over half of all alumni had taught or were currently teaching in the arts.
- Some 80 percent had been self-employed at some point.
- Of those who are no longer professional artists, the top reasons for switching fields were: steadier income (53 percent); better opportunities (41 percent); and debt, including student loans (27 percent).
- More than 80 percent of undergraduate and graduate alumni reported finding a job within a year of graduating. Some 68 percent of undergrad alumni and 76 percent of graduate alumni said it was a very good or pretty good career match.

For more details from the 2009 survey, including interactive graphics showing how much artists earn and where they live, visit <http://www.snaapshot.org/>. Institutions interested in taking part in the first national administration of the survey in 2011 should visit the project's Web site at <http://www.snaap.indiana.edu/>.