

THE ARTIST AS CITIZEN: AFTER THE CULTURE WARS

A paper based on findings from INFORMATION ON ARTISTS II
A study of artists' work-related human and social service needs
Conducted by the Research Center for Arts and Culture
At Columbia University and reprinted with permission.

Prepared for

1998 Conference on Social Theory, Politics and the Arts
Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA
October 9-11, 1998

By Joan Jeffri

© Joan Jeffri, 1998.

“America needs its artists to help it obey that most ancient of human admonitions, to know thyself.”

(Robert MacNeil, *American Creativity at Risk*)

“Part of the job of leading is holding out a vision for others and inspiring people. You do not need to apologize for your passion or for caring about the issue that you are trying to organize around. You can appeal to people’s thinking, not their terrors. ... We can train new leaders by cherishing them. We have a responsibility to counter the cynicism that our generation is credited with. We can do that by being affirmative and respecting each other, and respecting people whose viewpoints we may not agree with or look towards.”

(Alexander Gray, NAAO: A Gathering of Artists and Arts Professionals
Thirty Years of Age and Under)

PREAMBLE

The impetus for this study was to track the condition of artists, as expressed by the artists themselves, from 1988 to 1997. The original study, INFORMATION ON ARTISTS I, elicited information about artists’ work-related human and social service needs in the areas OF health care, pension, welfare, credit, live/work space and legal and financial need. The new survey, INFORMATION ON ARTISTS II, while remaining basically the same for comparison purposes, added 14 new questions on Community, Technology and Professional Status.

Over the last decade, the Research Center also conducted a study on the training and career development of artists, and assisted other communities in several smaller studies. Throughout all of these it became clearer and clearer that artists, especially during the havoc of the Culture Wars, wanted their voices heard. And part of what those voices were saying was that artists are contributors to society and wish to be recognized as such.

This paper focuses on those contributions after giving some background on the way the study was conducted and the site visits that preceded and informed it.

INTRODUCTION¹

In 1997 the Research Center for Arts and Culture (RCAC) at Columbia University returned to its 1988 national study on individual artists. The original study, INFORMATION ON ARTISTS (IOA I), surveyed 10,000 artists in ten U.S. locations: Boston, Cape Cod, Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, Minneapolis/St.Paul, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco and western Massachusetts. The original response rate was 42%, with the response from Chicago a high of 48%.

INFORMATION ON ARTISTS II (IOA II) returned to four of the original ten locations: Los Angeles, Minneapolis/St. Paul, New York and San Francisco and surveyed 7,700 artists in two parallel surveys. For Study One, the first survey of 4,000 artists, we obtained artists’ names and addresses from the same organizations used in 1988. The response rate for Study One was 31%(1254), with the response from New York a high of 36%. For Study Two, the second survey of 3,700 artists, we obtained new lists with a special effort to obtain names from organizations that represent artists more specifically in terms of race, ethnicity or cultural background. The response rate for Study Two was 28% (1021), with the response from Los Angeles a high of 39%.

¹ Percentages often add up to more than 100% since some respondents answered in more than one category even when otherwise instructed. All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number in the Introduction, and thereafter to the nearest tenth. The margin for error is plus or minus 5% and in certain questions, plus or minus 3%. The answers to this survey and its predecessor are for 1997 and 1989 respectively, except for the financial data which required answers based on calendar year 1996 (1988).

The aggregate response rate for the 1997 Study One and Study Two was 30% (2275). As heartening as this response was the return by 87% of the artists of a Voluntary Response Card, giving us individual names and addresses to allow us to create trend data in the future.

This report is organized in five sections. Following the Introduction is the Executive Summary specific to one of our four cities, Actors' Equity Association or to issues by race. Following that is a grid containing percentages and frequencies that correspond to the questions on the questionnaire. An Appendix and Bibliography appear at the end.

Although we cannot say with certainty, it is possible that the buffeting artists have taken during the last decade, as evidenced by national scandals, discussions of morality, censorship and freedom of expression, and the dissolution of individual fellowship grants at the National Endowment for the Arts may have contributed to the reduced rate of response.

Nevertheless, perhaps now more than ever, there continues to be a felt need for reliable, consistent information on artists and their condition in American society, for assistance in translating this information into policies and programs, and for making this information accessible to the artists themselves.

Artists' requirements often differ from other workers' needs in areas of work-related, human and social services including health care and insurance, life insurance, retirement plans, credit, living and working space, and legal and financial expertise. These requirements may elicit particular strategies by those who seek to fulfill these needs. Conversely, some of those needs are the same as those of other kinds of workers but, until now, there has been little information to compare to other professions where this kind of information gathering has a long history. Additionally, as evidenced by artists we heard from during this study, some artists wish to be analyzed according to their value to the community, and not according to their needs.

The purposes of this study are:

- to provide an important comparative benchmark on the artist's condition in the United States from 1988 to 1997;
- to facilitate better descriptions of artists in terms of their economic and professional status in different artistic disciplines and in different geographic locations;
- to cooperate and collaborate with local arts service and artists' service agencies in each location to make this information usable and useful to them;
- to continue to demystify the survey process and data gathering mechanisms that will enable agencies in each location to make specific connections between data from the field and the creation of new programs and the modification of existing ones;
- to provide solid information, over time, to build a case for artists alongside other professionals.

CONTEXT

During the last decade there have been a number of initiatives by and for individual artists in this country. Two national conferences at Orcas Island in Washington state and in Montauk, New York brought together artists, funders, managers and sympathizers interested in the plight of the American artist. Seven states formed a consortium and secured a challenge grant on behalf of programs for individual artists from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). In 1994 the NEA convened a national conference in Chicago, ART 21, at which a main theme was the Artist in Society; unfortunately, soon after practical recommendations were made regarding the support and encouragement of individual artists, individual artist grants at the NEA began to be eliminated. And organizations in each discipline, such as the National Association of Artists' Organizations and the Theatre Communications Group, continued to have annual meetings at which the individual artist theme played a major role.

More recently, a group called the Artists Projects Regional Initiative was formed. With it, the National Artists Advocacy Group (NAAG) gave birth in 1995 to a Chicago gathering known as the Cenacle Conference. This focused

on the 1996 elections, the image and role of artists, and the possibility of a trust for artists. In 1996, an initiative called the Hedge-Apple Initiative grew out of a conference on sustaining American artists at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. Among other ideas was one for the creation of a “fair practices and standards” handbook for artists and a focus on funding, services and advocacy. A series of meetings called 2007 AND BEYOND brought a group of artists and grassroots activists together to influence national policy on artists “whether invited to do so or not.” The National Association of Artists’ Organizations (NAAO) held a series of meetings with artists under thirty years of age to discuss their needs and realities. Brown University hosted a colloquium on creativity. A number of private foundations funded a national review of financial support for artists and explored the idea of a national “Trust for Artists.” In Rhode Island, a special Arts and Entertainment District was formed which allows artists who live and work there exemptions from state taxes on revenues from their work; patrons pay no state sales tax on arts purchases within the district; and downtown building owners who convert unused commercial and office space into affordable artists living spaces get a reduction of their real estate taxes.

Individual locations produced conferences, reports, symposia and studies expressing concern for and showing the value of the individual artists to the local and national community. While the National Endowment for the Arts virtually terminated its grants to individual artists, some private foundations initiated new programs and substantial programs like the Guggenheim and MacArthur Fellowships continued.

METHODOLOGY

Four of the original locations were chosen from the original ten due to financial limitations (as in 1988, funds were raised from sources in each community)--Los Angeles, Minneapolis/St. Paul, New York, and San Francisco. Site visits were held in each city between January and April 1997. A broad invitational net was cast and telephone communication was in English and Spanish. Invitations were sent first, to institutions and second, directly to individuals by mail or via email to between 100 and 400 members of the arts and artists’ community in each location. As in IOA I, the RCAC employed a series of site visits to hold town meetings prior to the administration of the questionnaire in each location to share information, get input and form links with artists, arts administrators, service agencies, arts organizations and other members of the artists’ communities.

NEW NEEDS

For the purposes of comparability and the integrity of the study, we used the same questionnaire and, in Study One, we returned to the same agencies from which we obtained lists of artists in 1988. In addition, we used a random sample for 25% of the artists from Actors’ Equity Association in each city. Several changes during the decade added to our original plan:

1. A few agencies had gone out of business or had been assumed under a different organization; in these latter cases we attempted to gather artists’ names from that part of the new organization’s list that was most comparable to the 1988 participants.
2. During our site visits, several topic areas emerged where radical change had taken place during the last decade: health plans and health insurance, partly due to the AIDS crisis, technology, artists’ perceptions of being recognized as professionals, and artists’ involvement in their communities through voting, advocacy, community service, etc. Fourteen new questions were added to the original questionnaire to reflect these changes.
3. A more substantial population of multicultural artists in the United States responded to our survey in 1997. This is a population the RCAC has tried to address in past surveys, but without enough success. For smaller organizations and those for whom technology was a problem, we offered assistance and standardization. In Study One and Study Two we received permission from our list providers to use their names in our cover letter that accompanied the questionnaire, so that artists knew exactly where we obtained their names.
4. One great limitation in artist research is the lack of a longitudinal database which allows researchers to track specific artists over time. Since RCAC questionnaires have always been anonymous, we had no way of knowing exactly which artists were being resurveyed after a nine-year hiatus; therefore we could not compare specific responses over time. IOA II included a voluntary response card asking artists to identify themselves by name

and address so that we could form a core group of individuals for a longitudinal database. Surprisingly, 87% of the respondents volunteered their name, address and e-mail information.

LIMITATIONS

This study admittedly only captures artists who are affiliated with organizations. Indeed, it is the growth in both numbers and diversity of organizations during the last decade and our vigilance to contact a broad variety of them that garnered us a response rate in Study Two of 29% from African-Americans, Asians, Hispanics, Native American and Pacific Islanders.

This kind of study has rarely been undertaken, partly because there is no definitive universe of artists. The universe provided by the U.S. Census is also an imperfect source. We have made a necessary assumption that a good proportion of our artists also appear in the U.S. Census as artists, but this study cannot tell us the answer to the familiar question, "How many artists are there?" Nevertheless, we are confident that, with over 89% of our respondents defining themselves as artists and belonging to at least one arts service organization, we are surveying an artist population.

Although we have taken great care to eliminate the possibility of one person receiving more than one questionnaire, a person registered under more than one name or with variations to that name may have received more than one questionnaire.

Finally, certain organizations could not provide lists as a matter of policy, and others had lists that were not current or unavailable. Two other caveats must be added: the survey is in English only and written surveys are less effective in some cultures.

SITE VISIT ISSUES

During the period 1988-1997, Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* was published and his life threatened. Crises erupted at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. and the Contemporary Art Center in Cincinnati over an exhibition of photographs by artist Robert Mapplethorpe and over an art work by Andres Serrano supported indirectly by funds from the National Endowment for the Arts. Other crises followed, including performances involving human blood by Ron Athey at the Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis/St.Paul. Revolt occurred in Tianenman Square in China where a model of our Statue of Liberty set the tone for the rebellion. Nelson Mandela was released from prison, shared the Nobel Peace Prize, and became the first black president of South Africa. The Berlin Wall fell, the Americans with Disabilities Act passed into law, and countries in Central and Eastern Europe became emerging democracies grappling with concepts of a marketplace economy and a civil society. Riots tore South-Central Los Angeles after an acquittal in the Rodney King beating. Christo wrapped the Reichstag and the first Republican Congress since 1946 was elected in the United States.

And American cities, having received over thirty years of public as well as private and corporate support of the arts, boasted substantial and visible cultural infrastructures in the form of arts centers, cultural facilities, public art and public programs.

The visual art market rose to unprecedented heights and then descended, as art became a common buzzword touted in economic impact studies, cited for its leveraging ability both financially and internationally, as a public investment, as a communicator, pacifier and bridgebuilder to attract tourism, create equity and educate children.

By the 1980s, support for artists, according to a privately commissioned study, had fewer than ten percent of those foundations that contributed to the arts giving direct grants to artists. Later in the decade, the Foundation Center published a study attesting to the probability that even those would either remain steady or would terminate their gifts. By the mid-nineties, when the NEA abandoned its grants to individual artists, it had become clear that the leveraging factor from the NEA's seal of approval was the major benefit.

Artists were faced with a changed, charged landscape. In view of the turbulence of the decade, our site visits were an important mechanism for us to hear from artists directly.

1. Public Perception of Artists

In addition to the usual definitional problem (“Who is an artist?”), both the artist’s self-worth and his relationship to society emerged again and again. Economic value systems, artists as entrepreneurs were aspects of this issue, and in Los Angeles and San Francisco there was a sense that artists needed to learn to take care of themselves by creating or identifying new financing schemes, cooperative relationships and resources. Artists spoke of shifting public focus from their needs to their contributions in the community—as employers paying taxes, for example.

2. Copyright and Intellectual Property

Artists from all sites were particularly concerned with protecting and licensing their work in relation to the new technology and some were concerned about the distancing and distortion of art communicated through technology.

3. Live/Work Space

Artists’ housing and gentrification have become embroiled in legal hassles, sometimes over ordinances that exist but are not upheld. Unique space and equipment needs were discussed as well as investigation into new kinds of spaces for artists (i.e. military bases). In some cities, open studio events to promote art and greater public access are unintended invitations to city inspectors seeking building code violations. In others, corruption has resulted in artists’ housing complexes with almost no artists.

4. Advocacy

Artists discussed the need to be advocates for themselves and their work and included references to involvement in local politics, collective advocacy and lobbying, and voting. Some artists lamented the lack of a unified voice. They asked for copies of relevant information from this study to use in advocating for themselves.

5. Geographic and Definitional Distance

Physical distance between artist communities was seen as a challenge in Los Angeles, as was the distinction between art and entertainment. In New York, this manifested itself as the difference between art and popular culture.

6. Recognition as a Professional

Tied to the public perception theme, professional recognition by the public included providing that public with a broader view of artists, what they do and the amount of training they have. The idea of a handbook of professional practices and standards was suggested, as well as licensing and certification of artists. Tied to this was the very difficult situation of aging artists who, under-valued by society, have serious problems with health care and survival needs as they grow older.

7. The Arts Environment

The idea of creating a healthier arts environment added resonance to the site visits and echoed other publications and meetings around the country. This was often a response to the image of the artist as target, and the artist’s life as translated into a debate about morals. Too, it was a reaction against the plethora of economic impact studies that, to some artists, justify the arts and artists in purely economic terms.

SELECTING THE SAMPLES

Two samples were selected for Information on Artists II. Originally, the study was to be solely an update on artists in four of the original ten locations: Los Angeles, Minneapolis/St. Paul, New York City and San Francisco. The sample for this study, which we call Study One throughout this document, was gathered by returning to those same organizations that provided us with lists of artists in 1988, obtaining lists from them and, after cleaning the lists, selecting a random sample of 750 artists in each location. As in our 1988 study the lists represented artists from a wide variety of artistic disciplines. And as in 1988, Actors’ Equity Association gave us a random sample of 250 of its members in each of the four cities which was merged with the other random samples to eliminate duplicates. The

samples covered artists from the following zip codes: 90 and 91 in Los Angeles, 5510 and 5540 in Minneapolis/St. Paul, 10 and 11 in New York, and 941 and 95 in San Francisco.

As our investigation progressed, we realized a common limitation of our and other surveys was that they do not reflect the cultural diversity of the population being studied. Therefore, we decided to create a parallel survey, which we call Study Two throughout this document. We followed the same general procedure, and again we were vigilant in inviting artists from many cultures to our site visit meetings and, when obtaining organizational lists of artists, we relied heavily on organizations that served diverse artists.

It is because of these differing methodologies that we report data from the two studies separately. Study One data are also used in comparison to our 1988 data. Study Two elicited responses from .9% American Indians or Alaskan Natives, 12.3% Asians or Pacific Islanders, 6.4% Blacks or African-Americans, 9.8% Hispanics and 61.2% white non-Hispanics. The data are broken out in reports by city for Study One and Study Two, with additional reports on the Actors' Equity sample from Study One and a report by race from Study Two.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE PACKET

Each site received the same basic cover letter assuring anonymity and privacy of respondents' information, describing the study and the RCAC, the other locations where the survey was being administered, the fact that approximately 2,000 artists were being surveyed in each location, and assuring participants that after this packet and a reminder post card were mailed, all name and address lists would be destroyed.

After questions asking whether a respondent was an artist and had received no other copy of the questionnaire, the questionnaire had six sections:

- IMPORTANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION
- LEGAL AND FINANCIAL SERVICES
- LIVING, WORKING AND MAKING ART
- HEALTH, PENSION AND WELFARE

Subsection on income with categories adjusted upwards to account for the gap of almost a decade, number of dependents, marital status, and some new questions related to health.

- ADDITIONAL ISSUES
This section included new questions listed under sections for COMMUNITY, TECHNOLOGY and PROFESSIONAL STATUS.
- COMMENTS - An open-ended section.

At three separate places on the questionnaire, including the area devoted to income, respondents were assured that all answers would remain confidential.

Each questionnaire was marked in the upper right corner with the appropriate city. Study One and Study Two questionnaires were printed on two different color papers.

~

Also explained in the letter was the inclusion of a voluntary, postage-paid reply card for artists to volunteer their names and addresses to help us construct a longitudinal database. This was to be mailed separately from the questionnaire which was to be returned in a stamped return envelope.

~

Ten days after the questionnaire packet was mailed, a reminder post card was sent asking once again for a response. It should be noted as a comment on the U.S. Postal Service that a questionnaire from our 1988 survey was returned on June 2, 1997—9 years later—having been lodged behind a mail chute in Boston. The comment, so many years later, is also revealing:

*I consider it an honor to have been included among artists chosen for this questionnaire.
It gives me a much-needed boost to keep persevering.*

COMMENTS

The issues in this document give hard information about many basic realities in artists' lives and highlight some even more basic needs. The comments are often as enriching as the data, since they both deepen and humanize the facts. As with any survey population, a range of attitudes is manifested from artists who view their profession as a calling to those who claim it as a curse.

Artists reflect our particular culture in unique and important ways. This document should provide some insight into the ways they are surviving within that culture.

In addition to the data, at least one-third of the respondents provided additional comments at the end, similar to our 1988 study—which indicates a high degree of involvement. And over one third of those thanked us for doing this. There were many respondents who wanted to see the results, and some who wondered what good the results would do.

ARTIST DEFINITIONS

The organizations that provided us with lists of artists identified them in different ways:

Self-Definition:

Some left the decision up to the artist when s/he applied to the organization for membership or services. **Distribution:** One organization defined artists as “persons whose art we distribute;” another as people who “create work in multiple media for public or private exhibition or performance.”

By review:

One agency reviewed resumes, professional affiliations, schooling, body of work and references. Another required each artist to complete an “Artist Action Plan.”

As recipient of financial help or services:

Some artists were on lists as a result of having applied for or received grants or fiscal sponsorship.

One defined artists on their lists as “anyone involved in the creation of art”, another as “any persons using ‘the arts’ to express culture, emotion, beauty, etc.”

In both Study One and Study Two, questions of definition brought questions of professionalism and cultural identity to the fore, in addition to the concept of “serious artists” and of needing to “earn” the title. Some respondents seemed confused in regard to society’s definitions of professionals, even while calling themselves artists.

At the end of the questionnaire, people were asked, “When responding to questionnaires about general issues, or to census questionnaires, what one term do you use to describe your occupation?”

As well as the general term “artist,” or the specific type of artist (composer, jewelry maker, etc.) other responses included those reflecting the multiple jobs of many artists:

Actor/singer/banker

Artist and therapist

Cook and artist

Actor/teacher/choreographer

Artist/educator

Artist/art teacher

Artist/planner

Fine Artist/Conservator

Some listed terms that reflected a non-artist occupation:

Fundraiser
Health care administrator
Arts administrator
Bookkeeper

In an earlier question, artists described themselves in more specific ways, including:

Creator
Public artist
Puppeteer
Comic book artist
Essayist
Pop song writer

The less routine answers included disabled, image maker, artist – and as an adjective I would use “difficult,” and “artist—when I’m applying for loans I do not say I’m an artist, because it would not be approved.”

CERTIFICATION

Although it was covered in the body of the questionnaire, the topic of certification surfaced in the comments as well, and questions about who should provide such certification.

MONEY

In Study One, income, financing and money garnered many comments, some from artists stating they had to stop practicing their art due to financial constraints, or that, conversely, they stopped applying for grants because it took too much time away from their art making. The cost of training in relation to the cost of living as an artist was an issue.

Age, gender, child rearing, sexual orientation, bi-lingualism, political and other discrimination and racism all have economic ramifications. Special problems were cited, both legally and financially, for immigrants and artists of foreign nationalities. The difficulty getting credit, even with a ten-year good credit rating, was described as well as a speculation on the relationship among art, activism and wage-earning.

In Study Two, financial insecurity, paying back student loans, the unevenness of artistic income from year to year, the huge amount of debt were all themes. A question that someone suggested and answered was, “How does your need for financial security affect your art?” Another added, “How many jobs supplement your art income? (3 very part time jobs)” One artist listed his name and address with the comment: “Please send CA\$H! Very poor. Landlord irate. Bills unpaid.”

HEALTH INSURANCE

In both Study One and Study Two, health insurance came up time and time again as a major problem for artists—the lack of it, the difficulty in obtaining it, the lack of group plans for artists, the high cost of premiums. A number of visual artists suggested a national union for visual artists that could give access to health insurance, credit unions, health hazard information, and other services.

One artist suggested a model program in Germany, where businesses and organizations that profit from artists’ labors pay into a fund providing medical coverage for professional artists.

One artist referred to a common perception that artists enjoy what they do, and added, “Is this compensation for not having health insurance, for supporting oneself by part-time employment, for insecurity of employment, and for marginalization in society?”

HOUSING

Housing was a major issue in our site visit meetings as well as on the questionnaire. While there were some success stories, special low-cost housing for artists created in the 1970s and '80s, according to some artists, has turned into just another scam with many housing no artists at all. In one location, artists told us the story of city inspectors who signed up for open studio tours in order to identify violations in artists' spaces. In Study Two, an artist wondered how many years artists have lived in one place, and in how many different states during their art careers and if they feel safe where they live and work.

ARTIST IN SOCIETY

As much as economic support is needed, so is emotional support. Many artists referred to the lack of value of the arts in our current society and the need for spiritual, psychological support. In Study One, one artist wrote:

I do not feel supported in our society as an artist.

I do not feel supported in our society as a professional.

I do not feel supported in our society as a human being.

Another described artists as “chronic malcontents as well as legitimate victims.”

Artists pointed to punitive tax laws, lack of access to health insurance, unfair practices in the business end of the arts. There were those who ruminated on the fine art versus commercial art equation and on the lack of government support or recognition of artists.

In Study Two, one issue was by what standards does one measure growth or progress as an artist—larger audience, more money, good press? And what are the goals, dreams and aims of an artist who does not define success in terms of money?

One artist commented, “I’m a Bus Operator as my regular job and a self-employed Artist. I hate my job as a bus operator, but love being an Artist, but I’ve done very poor as an Artist. I haven’t made any money. I feel that I’m going to be a Bus Operator all my life.”

Another asked, “When will this society decide that filling a school child’s head and heart with ideas is as valuable as filling a cavity in a tooth?”

One artist suggested a general campaign (such as anti-smoking or safe sex) to upgrade the general public’s interest in art. Another cited the importance of how the artist views himself serving a social function in the community and enriching it. One spoke about the lack of community and local arts council support of artists’ work.

There were also letters that we received, some attached to the questionnaires, some not. Some artists who didn’t feel they could respond to the questionnaires wrote letters instead with very instructive information. One retiree told us that the actors’ unions did not create health and pension plans for their members until the early 1960s and wrote about the difficulty in acquiring benefits, and being hired over age 60. “The artist is not necessary in this society,” he wrote. “We worship the Donald Trumps, the Ted Turners. We worship money, period. People over 65 have been born at the wrong time, in the wrong place.”

And an artist speaking in the context of art galleries, added to the questionnaire, “Why can’t it be more fun and less scary?”

THE ARTIST AS CITIZEN

The questionnaire from our 1988 study was used again in 1997 for comparison purposes, but 14 new questions were added. These questions emerged out of our site visits and our discussions with artists, as well as our observation of major changes within the last decade. The questions fell into 3 categories: Community, Technology and Professional Status.

It is the area of Community we focus on here or the Artists as Citizen. This focus counteracts the common misperception that artists are isolated, elitist bohemians, somehow separate from society and uninvolved in the same concerns most people have. We asked artists whether they voted in local, state or federal elections in the previous 2 years, if they were registered with a political party, how they had engaged with their communities over the last 2 years, and if they had volunteered or performed community service and for how many hours a week.

We found that 88% had voted in federal elections in the previous 2 years and over 78% had voted in local and state elections during the same period. Over 79% are registered Democrats.

SUMMARY

While some people still cling to the 19th century myth of the starving artist, marginalized from society and living in isolation(which many confuse with freedom), today's artists, at least according to this study, are involved in their communities, vote in elections, use computers, and are planning for retirement. Nevertheless, close to 62% of the artists here earn less than \$30,000 in gross individual income, and 45% earn less than \$3,000 from their art; 59-60% have only 1-2 dependents and 45% are single. Only 26-30% earned their major income from art in the previous year. And yet, over 80% list the career of artist as most important to them and 89% consider themselves professional artists.

This kind of information is added to our growing database of information about artists at the Research Center for Arts and Culture. It will also be used in a media campaign in fall of 1998, and as the basis for a meeting with representatives of the arts service, artists and arts funding communities from each of the four site locations. Continued collaborations will be forged with the field as well as continued ideas for use of the data. We will also begin to place relevant information on our website for use by the field.

Data, of course, must be viewed within the context of the communities and the artists from which they come. In addition, comparisons of artists to other professions, across disciplines, and with artists in other countries is helpful to our understanding of the artist's situation in the United States. The Research Center's comparisons of painters in the early 1990s in the United States and Australia showed them to be very similar in areas of income, occupational, marketplace and peer recognition; American painters, however, were more highly educated than their Australian counterparts. Continuing research with a university social science institute in Portugal will yield comparisons between American and Portuguese artists during the coming year.

In this study, some of the major findings include:

- Artists (like arts audiences) are highly educated, with between 38% and 43% having both undergraduate and graduate degrees.
- 64-65% of the artists received some art-related training in their particular city or region; for blacks this was as high as 79%.
- Artists, like many in the population, have veered away from private physicians and insurance plans, toward HMOs and PPOs. Nevertheless, 14% in Study One and 16% in Study Two do not obtain routine health care.
- With a mean age of 41, 59% in Study One and 55% in Study Two have retirement plans. At least 9% more whites have retirement plans than Asians, blacks or Hispanics.
- There are indications, that artists of white non-Hispanic backgrounds and Asian backgrounds do better economically than Black and Hispanic artists.
- More Asians have college degrees (48%) and more Asians and whites have graduate degrees (38% and 42%) than black or Hispanic artists.
- 3% of the artists in Study One and 4% in Study Two earned over \$60,000 from their art in 1996; 5% of the Asian and 6% of the white respondents in Study Two earned over \$60,000 from their art in 1996.
- 45% of the artists earned under \$3,000 from their art in 1996. Black artists in Study Two did somewhat better, with only 35% earning under \$3,000 from their art.
- 62% of the artists in Study One and 64% of the artists in Study Two earned under \$30,000 total gross individual income including income from art in 1996. In Study Two this was true of over 70% of the Asians, blacks and Hispanics.
- In applying for bank loans, lines of credit, mortgages and credit cards, more blacks and Hispanics were turned down than Asians and whites.
- Artists have a strong community involvement, evidenced by voting over the last 2 years: 89% in Study One and 87% in Study Two in federal, 87% in Study One and 84% in Study Two in state, and 81% in Study One and 78% in Study Two in local elections in the last two years, and by community involvement: 61% in Study One and 65% in Study Two volunteered, 43% in Study One and 50% in Study Two performed community service.
- 79% in Study One and 76% in Study Two are registered Democrats.
- Artists advocate for causes: 41% in Study One and 38% in Study Two wrote to legislators or public officials and 27% in Study One and 30% in Study Two have been active in advocacy organizations during the last 2 years.
- 76% in Study One and 75% in Study Two own computers; over 40% use them in relation to their art.
- Artists are concerned about their professional status: 35% in Study One and 38% in Study Two would like to be certified as artists in the way lawyers, doctors, CPAs are certified; 74% in Study One and 79% in Study Two would find a handbook of “fair practices and standards for artists” useful.

Economically, artists seem to be doing about the same as in 1988, although in California, artists in both studies seem to have done better in grants and royalties.

Unlike other countries, the United States has no mandates for the Status of the Artist. The country's size, competing media, and various campaigns for advocacy of one cause or another, combined with the ongoing Culture Wars, may make artists seem unconnected and inarticulate. Certainly, our site visits proved otherwise, as did many of the responses to the survey.

In her article, **Social Responsibility and the Place of the Artist in Society**, Carol Becker discusses the naïve sense of artistic freedom where the need to explore and express ideas, fantasies and creations cannot be separated “from the decisive editing process necessary for artists to choose what they will show and how they will show it.” When this naivete occurs, it confuses all serious questions about the potential effect of artistic work with real freedom of expression, and clouds the real discussion. “Freedom for the artist thus comes to signify the right to do whatever one wants, however one wants, whenever and wherever one wants, without consideration of consequence. This does leave the artist alone, free to do whatever he or she imagines possible, but inevitably lonely, without an ongoing dialogue with a world larger than the art community.”

This study has tried to address the needs and realities of the American artist, and to do some comparisons of those needs over close to a ten-year period of time, but it has also tried to begin to answer the question raised by a number of artists in our site visits, “Why aren't we showing what artists contribute to society, not just what they need from it?”