

## ARTISTS TRAINING AND CAREER PROJECT

### INTRODUCTION

THE ARTISTS TRAINING AND CAREER PROJECT is a study of the training and career choices and patterns of craftspeople, painters and actors; the first phase of the project focuses on craftspeople. This study examines artists' responses to institutions, society and culture by using two distinct and complementary methodologies - a series of personal narrative interviews, followed by a national survey of a sampling of craft artists. Artists themselves are at the heart of this study; they were asked to describe systematically the impact of their choices on their work, their requirements for doing their work over time, and their career development and satisfaction. The areas of investigation have been developed through the creation of a seven-stage "validation sequence" from early childhood through mature careers.

By eliciting information about the kinds of validations as well as the resistances the artist meets, the Research Center for Arts and Culture can begin to describe the training and career development of craftspeople, painters, and actors; the work also contributes to the career literature that includes research in the scientific, legal, medical, and police professions, and has been sadly lacking in the arts. It provides important information for advocates and funders, and can give educational institutions a better idea of areas of greatest training needs, as well as information about the timing and appropriateness of assistance for artists. Finally, it documents the position of the artist as an integral member of society.

Throughout the study, both for the personal narrative interviews and the survey, all craft media were represented: clay, fiber, glass, leather, metal, mixed media, paper, and wood. Attempts were made to insure geographic representation from all over the country, ethnic diversity, different ages, males and females, and people who were trained in a variety of ways.

### INTERVIEWS

The first component of the project consisted of personal narrative interviews with 35 artists and 15 related experts, people whose work deals closely with the work of craftspeople, but who may not be craftspeople themselves. These were chosen from names of approximately 400 people collected by the RCAC staff. All 50 interviews were taped; the budget allowed for 25 of them to be transcribed. The tapes and transcripts will be housed in the Oral History Collection at Butler Library, Columbia University. In 1992, The Craftsperson Speaks, a volume of ten of our craftsperson interviews will be published by Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc. Each interview will be accompanied by brief biographical

information, a list of the permanent collections in which the craftsperson's work resides, our history of the craftsperson in the United States, and a brief bibliography.

## THE SURVEY

### Questionnaire Development

Our basic schema for investigation was a seven-stage career model covering Initial Influences; Training and Preparation; Professional Institutions; Peer Influences; Marketplace Judgments; Critical Evaluation, and Late Careers.

The questionnaire was market-tested and refined and the final questionnaire included the following sections:

- \* Important Background Information
- \* Initial Influences
- \* Education, Training and Preparation
- \* Career Entry
- \* Peers and Colleagues
- \* Marketplace Judgments
- \* Critical Evaluation and Public Response
- \* Career Satisfaction and Maturity
- \* Current Activity
- \* Comments

A cover letter accompanied the questionnaire assuring respondent anonymity, and gave a list of crafts agencies and organizations that had aided us in the study.<sup>1</sup> A postage-paid return envelope was included, and a reminder postcard was sent ten days after the questionnaire, to increase the rate of response. All names and address lists of craftspeople were then destroyed.

Our intention was to have a very broad spectrum from which to

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<sup>1</sup> Among the many organizations that have participated in the development and distribution of this questionnaire are:

Alabama Crafts Council, American Association of Woodturners, American Craft Council, American Craft Enterprises, American Craft Exposition, Anderson Ranch Art Foundation, Archie Bray Foundation, Arizona Designer Craftsmen, Baltimore Clay Works, Ceramic Artists of San Diego, Enamel Guild: West, Guild of Bookworkers, Hand Workshop, Indian Arts and Crafts Association, Kraus Sikes, Marin Arts Council, Mendocino Art Center, Minnesota Crafts Council, National Council on Ceramic Education, New York Experimental Glass Workshop, New Mexico Metalsmiths' Association, Northwest Crafts Alliance, Northwest Designer Craftsmen, Northwest Basket Weavers, Penland School, Pennsylvania Guild of Craftsmen, Piedmont Craftsmen Incorporated, Qualla Arts and Crafts, Society of North American Goldsmiths, Texas Arts and Crafts Foundation, and Ward and Eis Gallery.

choose a sample, using lists that a) geographically represented all parts of the country; b) had different constituencies: national, regional, state, and local; c) represented all the craft media: clay, fiber, glass, leather, metals, mixed media, paper, wood; d) were from different types of organizations: arts centers, local guilds, membership organizations, galleries, magazines, craft fairs, craft councils, marketing organizations, and schools, and e) covered different ages, gender, and ethnic background.

### Response

A random sample of 3,942 craftspeople was chosen to receive questionnaires, mailed in September 1990. There was a total return of 33%, very high for a questionnaire as long and detailed as this one. In addition, almost half (48%) of the respondents wrote additional commentary on issues of particular concern to them.

### GENERAL DEMOGRAPHICS

The median **age** of respondents was 42, the mean age was 44, with the oldest respondent age 89. 54% of the respondents are female, and 46% are male.<sup>2</sup> 69% are married, 18% are single, with the remaining 13% divorced, widowed, or other. This compares with the 1988 general population figures of 68% married, 22% single, and 15% other. The range of dependents for respondents is one to eight, with a median of 2.

All but one state of the fifty were represented. The respondents are predominantly of white, non-Hispanic background, (92%). 1% indicated "Hispanic" 1% selected "Asian," under 1% each indicated "American Indian/Alaskan Native," and "Black," and 5% selected "other" or "specify further" as their response.

The extremely low percentages of **craftspeople of color** is a matter of some concern. Several explanations are possible. First, the primary craft tradition in America has grown out of middle and working class European traditions; second, there may be a greater tradition of membership in professionally oriented organizations among white Americans, than there is among people of color.

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<sup>2</sup> Percentages are generally rounded to the nearest number, which may result in totals exceeding 100%. Percentages may also add up to more than 100%, since some questions asked for an answer that included as many choices as applied; occasionally people answered with several choices per question, even when instructed otherwise. Also the number of respondents to individual questions varied, but averaged between 1150 and 1246 for most questions. The margin for error is plus or minus 3%, and in certain selected questions, plus or minus .5%.

Third, it is possible that in some cases, the predominant craft form produced by people of color is considered to be folk art, a form practiced primarily by those who are organized, if at all, by family heritage and clan traditions rather than professional membership organizations.

It is also possible that the current craft organizations are not serving the needs of people of color: the organizations are not attracting them, either because people of color have been unaware of the existence of such organizations, or because the organizational concerns have not responded to the needs of artists of color. This was reinforced by an African American mixed media artist, who said in her narrative interview that such organizations had not seemed relevant for her or her work.

### OCCUPATION

The issue of **professionalism** has provided an ongoing area of inquiry for the Research Center and is especially relevant for craftspeople, as 86% of the respondents consider themselves to be professionals, a word that has various meanings. One common definition of professionalism relies on standard occupational measures such as hours per week worked and major income derived; however, it is quite common that artists' major work, their art, is not their major source of income, nor necessarily what they spend the largest percentage of their time doing for payment. A second definition of professionalism relies on official credentialing as a result of examination--attorneys take the state bar exam, for example. Finally, when people use the word "professional" as a descriptor they may refer to the quality of the work and of production, rather than the credentials of the producer. Rather than create yet another definition which we feel would be neither better nor worse than existing ones, the Research Center asked the artists themselves to choose their own definition.

Respondents were asked to indicate their first three choices of definition of professionalism, both for themselves and for others, from 13 choices which included marketplace definitions (earning or intending to earn money from one's craft), definitions by education/association, and self definitions. Highest ranking both for describing one's self and for describing others was "inner drive to make art/craft" (31%) followed closely by "makes living as a craftsman" (24%), and "considers self to be a craftsman" (11%), and "has a special talent" (8%). Time spent and peer recognition ranked highest for respondents' second choices. The third choices added "receives some public recognition."

Later in the survey, "personal satisfaction" and the "inner drive to make art/craft" were the two most important factors influencing

respondents to pursue their careers in crafts.

74% of the respondents felt that their crafts or crafts-related occupation was the most important occupation to them, whether or not it was their primary source of income. Only 60%, however, chose the word "craftsperson" to describe their career, while 11% chose "small business man or woman."

#### Craft Earnings

Earning major income from one's work is one indication of professionalism. 92% of the respondents indicated that they earned money from their craftwork, and for 80% of the respondents, this money covered their craft-related costs. Only 36% however, indicated that they supported themselves entirely from their craftwork. 50% of the respondents earned their major income from their work as craftspeople, and 17% earned theirs from various craft related occupations, such as teaching art or crafts, sales of craft supplies, or curatorial work.

#### Income

We looked at income from three different perspectives: individual income from craft work, individual income from all sources, and gross household income.

For individual income from craft only:

- 47% earned \$7,000 or less,
- 9% earned between \$7,000-12,000,
- 12% earned between \$12,000-20,000,  
a total of 68% earning less than \$20,000.
- 14% earned between \$20,001-\$40,000, and
- 17% earned over \$40,000.

For those earning over \$40,000, the mean income was \$114,505, and the median income was \$78,000. 112 (65% of 173) earned under \$100,000, and 60 (35% of 173) earned between \$100,000 and \$200,000.

Looking at gross income for individual craftspeople, including all sources:

- 20% had incomes of less than \$10,000,
- 20% had incomes between \$10,000-\$20,000,
- 19% had incomes between \$20,000-\$30,000.
- 16% had incomes between \$30,000-\$40,000,
- 25% had incomes of over \$40,000.

In looking at total gross household income:

- 6% had incomes of less than \$10,000.
- 11% had incomes between \$10,000-\$20,000,
- 17% had incomes between \$20,001-\$30,000,
- 17% had incomes between \$30,000-\$40,000 and
- 49% had incomes over \$40,000,

49% of the respondents had gross household income over \$40,000,

while only 36% of the general population had gross household income over \$35,000. This indicates that almost half our craftspeople's households fell above the range of household income for the general population.

Costs: The largest percentage (21%) had craft-related costs between \$500-\$2500; 47% had costs of under \$5000, and 18% had costs over \$20,000. The majority of respondents said costs of materials, labor, marketing, insurance had increased since their early careers. The cost of materials has taken the biggest jump, seconded by the increased cost of marketing, which may indicate the increased investment in marketing practices in the last twenty years, as much as the increased cost of marketing itself.

#### Grants and Awards

One of the major marketplace issues for craftspeople is that of grants, an additional source of income that supports either the creation of a specific piece of artwork, or enables them to spend time doing exploration and research. Artistic validation conferred by receiving grants was frequently referred to as one of the major benefits, often more important than the money itself, in the narrative interviews with craftspeople.

21% (257) of our total sample indicated they had received art-related grants. 46% of those receiving grants had received only one, 46% had received grants from 2 to 4 times, and 8% had received 5 or more such grants. 45% of the respondents had received an increased number of grants over time. 45% (of 194 respondents) said that the financial amount of grants had increased. The sources of grants were state agencies, educational institutions, the National Endowment for the Arts, art colonies, the Craft Emergency Relief Fund, Fulbrights, Rotary, the GI Bill, and private foundations. While the range in amount of grant awards was from \$25 to \$50,000 with a median of \$700, since only 125 respondents answered this question, the figures should be viewed with caution.

### **EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

#### Initial Influences: Home, Parents, Art

As might be expected, 63% of the respondents participated in their first art experiences at home, and 60% at school.<sup>3</sup>

This seems to be in line with the finding that mothers were the most supportive family member. This is consonant with research done in other art forms, most notably the work of Donald Shetler of the Eastman School of Music, who carried out a study of symphony orchestra musicians in the late 1970s, and found a high incidence of support from the mother (63%).

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<sup>3</sup> Here again percentages may total more than 100 as respondents may have selected two or more responses.

### Elementary school

60% said that they had a few art classes in school; only 16% said they had many art classes. 36% said they had visits to museums and galleries, and 20% said they had after school or weekend classes. It is striking that 15% said they had no exposure at all.

### High School

By high school the percentage of those indicating that they had a few art classes in school dropped to 31%, and rose to 27% for those who had many art classes. 25% indicated that they had no art classes.

### Later Training

Artists in our survey began artistic training in their mid-to-late teens, the median age being 16. Consistent with profiles of artists, they have a high degree of formal education, 42% with college degrees, and another 34% with graduate degrees. 64% indicated that they had a formal degree in the arts, 34% had studied with one or more private teachers, 17% had studied at a conservatory or professional school, 10% had studied in a technical or vocational program, and 10% had studied in a certificate program.

Other educational experiences respondents had in preparation for their work in crafts included the following: self taught, work with a mentor or Master Craftsperson, crafts school, apprenticeship, alternative schooling experiences, and summer camp.

Of these, 44% felt that self-teaching was the most important post-high school art/craft training that they received, followed closely by university/college (41%), and workshops (30%). A very high 82% of the respondents had been exposed to professional craftspeople in their training.

## CAREER

### Career Entry

While a number of artists remarked that "career" is a term only recently applied to artists, respondents were asked to identify both the step marking their career entry, and their first professional recognition. The highest response in both cases was the first sale of their work. For career entry, 21% of the respondents identified selling their first piece of work as the event marking their career entry, 19% as their participation in their first crafts fair, 17% as having gotten their own studio. For first professional recognition, 36% identified the first sale of their work, 30% identified an award or honor, 25% a gallery show, and 14% winning a competition.

### Career Satisfaction

73% said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their careers and 89% said they would choose the same career if they had it to

do over again. 51% said they were very satisfied with the work itself, and 50% said they were very satisfied with the process of doing the work.

#### Satisfactions and Disappointments

The last two questions asked respondents to describe the moments of greatest disappointment and greatest satisfaction in their careers. It was interesting to see these written replies alongside those questions asking them to indicate career satisfaction at this point in their lives.

Clearly the greatest disappointments centered around money and acceptance. No or low sales, not being able to make a living or have financial security were prime concerns. Another great disappointment was not getting a National Endowment for the Arts or other professional grant.

An equally important area of disappointment was the area of acceptance--not being accepted to a craft fair, a gallery, a juried show, not winning an award or competition, or rejection of a previously commissioned work. Especially in clay and glass, some respondents' disappointments centered on having ruined the work itself, having work or equipment stolen, studios vandalized, or work altered by the purchaser. Some craftspeople expressed frustration with a cultural system in which they feel their work is denigrated or not taken seriously, such as the person whose greatest disappointment was being asked "to produce an eight foot replica of a strawberry." Others expressed frustration with being unable to translate their own vision: one expressed the greatest disappointment as being "When I can't get a piece out of my head and through my hands."

The same two areas--money and acceptance--provided many moments of satisfaction. A positive relationship with the market was very important--sale of designs as well as works, consumer acceptance, NEA and other grants and fellowships. Acceptance of work at a show, fair, gallery, juried exhibition, or museum were events marking great satisfaction, as were awards, honors, or being chosen or singled out--often for the first time.

Equally shared with these two areas of satisfaction was a third--the work itself. One of the major areas of greatest satisfaction centered on personal gratification, including excitement about the work (one's own and others'), project completion, and creating the work itself.

#### SUMMARY

While the larger report presents our major findings more thoroughly, this executive summary gives a quick sketch of the American craftspeople as detailed in our study. The data, and our interviews suggest a well-educated, generally satisfied artist, a

product of both his or her time and place, with excitement and commitment in regard to the work itself, and a genuine respect for the material. The issues that emerge from THE ARTISTS TRAINING AND CAREER PROJECT are legion: the relationships between craftspeople and their support systems, characteristics by location, by medium, by gender, the use of different training systems at different ages and stages of the craftsperson's career, to name a few. There is a wealth of information here for future mining.

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