

Craft/Fine Artist

Snapshot

Career Cluster(s): Arts, A/V Technology & Communications; Business Management & Administration

Interests: Art; creativity; design

Earnings (Yearly Average): \$48,760

Employment & Outlook: Little or No Change Expected

OVERVIEW

Sphere of Work

Craft and fine artists use a variety of materials and techniques to create original works of art for sale and exhibition. Craft artists create objects, such as pottery, glassware, and textiles, that are designed to be functional. Fine artists, including painters, sculptors, and illustrators, create pieces of art more for aesthetics than for function.

Work Environment

Many artists work in fine- or commercial-art studios located in office buildings, warehouses, or lofts. Others work in private studios in their homes. Some artists share studio space, where they also may exhibit their work. Artists may also choose to work outdoors, depending on their medium and artistic intent.

Most craft and fine artists work full-time, although part-time and variable schedules are also common. Many hold another job in addition to their work as an artist. During busy periods,



Young artist making a clay bowl on a potter's wheel. Photo via iStock.com/Sladic. [Used under license.]

artists may work additional hours to meet deadlines. Those who are self-employed usually determine their own schedules.

Occupation Interest

Professional craft and fine artists are creative individuals by nature and have a desire to not only share their creations, but to turn their passion into a source of income. Over half of all craft and fine artists are self-employed, meaning these individuals must have a drive to succeed in a crowded and highly entrepreneurial field. In many cases, they should expect to work another job to make a living wage.

A Day in the Life—Duties and Responsibilities

Artists create objects that are beautiful, thought provoking, and sometimes shocking. They often strive to communicate ideas or feelings through their art.

Craft artists work with many different materials, including ceramics, glass, textiles, wood, metal, and paper. They use these materials to create unique pieces of art, such as pottery, quilts, stained glass, furniture, jewelry, and clothing. Many craft artists also use fine art techniques—for example, painting, sketching, and printing—to add finishing touches to their products.

Duties and Responsibilities

- Using techniques such as knitting, weaving, glassblowing, painting, drawing, and sculpting
- Developing creative ideas or new methods for making art
- Creating sketches, templates, or models to guide work
- Selecting which materials to use based on color, texture, strength, and other criteria
- Shaping, joining, or cutting materials for a final product
- Using visual techniques, such as composition, color, space, and perspective, to produce desired artistic effects
- Developing a portfolio that highlights artistic style and ability to show to gallery owners and others
- Displaying work at auctions, craft fairs, galleries, museums, and online marketplaces
- Completing grant proposals and applications to obtain financial support for projects

Profile

Interests: Things, People

Working Conditions: Both Inside and Outside

Physical Strength: Medium Work, Varies

Education Needs: On-the-Job Training, Bachelor's Degree

Licensure/Certification: Usually Not Required

Opportunities for Experience: Internship, Apprenticeship, Volunteer Work, Part-Time Work

Interest Score: ARE

Fine artists typically display their work in museums, in commercial or nonprofit art galleries, at craft fairs, in corporate collections, on the Internet, and in private homes. Some of their artwork may be commissioned (requested by a client), but most is sold by the artist or through private art galleries or dealers. The artist, gallery, and dealer together decide in advance how much of the proceeds from the sale each will keep.

Most craft and fine artists spend their time and effort selling their artwork to potential customers and building a reputation. This can include in-person showings and online sales through marketplaces designed specifically for selling one's own art. In addition to selling their artwork, many artists have at least one other job to support their craft or art careers.

Some artists work in museums or art galleries as art directors or as archivists, curators, or museum workers, planning and setting up exhibits. Others teach craft or art classes or conduct workshops in schools or in their own studios.

OCCUPATION SPECIALTIES

Cartoonist

Cartoonists create simplified or exaggerated drawings to visually convey political, advertising, comic, or sports concepts. Some cartoonists work with others who create the idea or story and write captions. Others create plots and write captions themselves. Most cartoonists have humorous, critical, or dramatic talent, in addition to drawing skills.

Ceramic Artist

Ceramic artists shape, form, and mold artworks out of clay, often using a potter's wheel and other tools. They glaze and fire pieces in kilns, which are large, special furnaces that dry and harden the clay.

Digital Artist

Digital artists use design and production software to create interactive art online. The digital imagery may then be transferred to paper or some other form of printmaking or made available directly on web-accessible devices.

Fiber Artist

Fiber artists use fabric, yarn, or other natural and synthetic materials to weave, knit, crochet, or sew textile art. They may use a loom to weave fabric, needles to knit or crochet yarn, or a sewing machine to join pieces of fabric for quilts or other handicrafts.

Fine-art Painter

Fine-art painters paint landscapes, portraits, and other subjects in a variety of styles, ranging from realistic to abstract. They may work in a variety of media, such as watercolors, oil paints, and acrylics.

Furniture Maker

Furniture makers cut, sand, join, and finish wood and other materials to make handcrafted furnishings. For information about other workers who assemble wood furniture, see the profile on woodworkers.

Glass Artist

Glass artists process glass in a variety of ways—such as by blowing, shaping, staining, or joining it—to create artistic pieces. Some processes require the use of kilns, ovens, and other equipment and tools that bend glass at high temperatures. These workers also decorate glass objects, such as by etching or painting.

Illustrator

Illustrators create pictures for books, magazines, and other publications and for commercial products, such as textiles, wrapping paper, stationery, greeting cards, and calendars. Illustrators increasingly use computers in their work. They might draw in pen or pencil and then scan the image, using software to add color, or they might use a special pen to draw images directly onto the computer.

Jewelry Artist

Jewelry artists use metals, stones, beads, and other materials to make objects for personal adornment, such as earrings or necklaces. For more information about other workers who create jewelry, see the profile on jewelers and precious stone and metal workers.

Medical/Scientific Illustrator

Medical and scientific illustrators combine drawing skills with knowledge of biology or other sciences. Medical illustrators work with computers or with pen and paper to create images, three-dimensional models, and animations of human anatomy and surgical procedures. Scientific illustrators draw animal and plant life, atomic and molecular structures, and geologic and planetary formations. These illustrations are used in medical and scientific publications and in audiovisual presentations for teaching purposes. Some medical and scientific illustrators work for lawyers, producing exhibits for court cases.

Printmaker

Printmakers create images on a silk screen, woodblock, lithography stone, metal etching plate, or other types of matrices. A hand printing press then creates the final work of art, inking and transferring the matrix to a piece of paper.

Public Artist

Public artists create large paintings, sculptures, and displays called “installations” that are meant to be seen in open spaces. These works are typically displayed in parks, museum grounds, train stations, and other public areas.

Sculptor

Sculptors design and shape three-dimensional works of art, either by molding and joining materials such as clay, glass, plastic, and metal or by cutting and carving forms from a block of plaster, wood, or stone. Some sculptors combine various materials to create mixed-media installations, such as by incorporating light, sound, and motion into their work.

Sketch Artist

Sketch artists are a type of illustrator who often use pencil, charcoal, or pastels to create likenesses of subjects. Their sketches are used by law enforcement agencies to help identify suspects, by the news media to show courtroom scenes, and by individual customers for their own enjoyment.

Tattoo Artist

Tattoo artists use stencils and draw by hand to create original images and text on skin. With specialized needles, these artists use a variety of styles and colors based on their clients’ preferences.

Video Artist

Video artists record avant-garde, moving imagery that is typically shown in a loop in art galleries, museums, or performance spaces. These artists sometimes use multiple monitors or create unusual spaces for the video to be shown.

WORK ENVIRONMENT

Immediate Physical Environment

Work settings for artists vary depending on the person and the type of art being created. Artists may also desire to have particular surroundings in order to inspire and stimulate creativity.

Artists’ studios are usually well lit and ventilated. However, artists may be exposed to fumes from glue, paint, ink, and other materials. They may also have to deal with dust or other residue from filings, splattered paint, or spilled cleaning and other fluids. Artists often wear protective gear, such as breathing masks and goggles, to remain safe from exposure to harmful materials. Ceramic and glass

artists must use caution in working with materials that may break into sharp pieces and in using equipment that can get extremely hot, such as kilns. Artists and related workers have one of the highest rates of injuries and illnesses of all occupations.

Human Environment

Depending on the person and nature of their art, human interaction during working hours may be limited. However, artists commonly share their studios with like-minded individuals to help cover rental and other costs, and possibly to share ideas and techniques. Artists also must be comfortable interacting with the public when selling their art, be it in person or online, and must be able to cope with criticism of their work. When selling or showing art in public, artists must also interact with gallery owners.

Technological Environment

Technological requirements vary widely in the field of craft and fine art. Much depends on the type of art being created and the medium being used. Most artists work with their hands and must be familiar with the tools and techniques required to accomplish what they envision. A painter must know the benefits and limitations of certain canvases, paints, and brushes, for example, while a sculptor must understand the properties of the material being used to sculpt. Painters may also become skilled at framing. Artists increasingly also use computer technology, including advances in areas such as 3D printing, in novel ways to create new forms of art. From a business standpoint, artists who sell their work to the public should be familiar with the internet platforms available, as well as record keeping software for organizational purposes.

EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND ADVANCEMENT

High School/Secondary

High school art classes can teach prospective craft artists the basic drawing skills they need. Craft and fine artists improve their skills through practice and repetition. English classes are also important for improving communication skills. High school students interested in pursuing art as a business should also take fundamental business classes and be comfortable with practical math.

Suggested High School Subjects

- Algebra
- Art/Design

- Biology
- Earth or Life or Physical Science
- Economics
- English
- Entrepreneurship
- Geometry
- History
- Physics
- Political Science
- Psychology
- Trigonometry

Related Career Pathways/Majors

Arts, A/V Technology & Communications

- Visual Arts Pathway

Business, Management & Administration Career Cluster

- Business Information Management Pathway
- General Management Pathway
- Operations Management Pathway

Transferable Skills and Abilities

Artistic Ability

- Creating artwork and other objects that are visually appealing or thought provoking

Business Skills

- Self-promotion in order to build a reputation
- Studying the market to increase understanding of what prospective customers might want
- Developing an online presence as an important part of art sales

Creativity

- Developing new and original ideas

Customer-service Skills

- Dealing with customers and prospective buyers

Dexterity

- Manipulating tools and materials to create art

Interpersonal Skills

- Interacting with people, including customers, gallery owners, and the public

Postsecondary

Most fine artists pursue postsecondary education to improve their skills and job prospects. A formal educational credential is typically not needed to be a craft artist. However, it is difficult to gain adequate artistic skills without some formal education.

A number of colleges and universities offer bachelor's and master's degrees in subjects related to fine arts. In addition to studio art and art history, postsecondary programs may include core subjects, such as English, marketing, social science, and natural science. Independent schools of art and design also offer postsecondary education programs, which can lead to a certificate in an art-related specialty or to an associate, bachelor's, or master's degree in fine arts.

The National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) accredits more than 360 postsecondary institutions with programs in art and design. Most of these schools award a degree in art.

Fast Fact

Learning and practicing art strongly correlates with higher achievement in reading and math.

Source: theoldjailartcenter.org



Painting can be a key to achievement in other disciplines. Photo via iStock.com/mediaphotos. [Used under license.]

Education gives artists an opportunity to develop their portfolio, which is a collection of an artist's work that demonstrates his or her styles and abilities. Portfolios are essential, because art directors, clients, and others look at them when deciding whether to hire an artist or to buy the artist's work. In addition to compiling a physical portfolio, many artists choose to create a portfolio online.

Related College Majors

- Architecture
- Art Design
- Digital Media
- Drawing & Painting
- Printmaking
- Sculpture
- Studio Arts

Adult Job Seekers

Adults who are looking to turn their artistic passion into a business should become familiar with art currently on the market in their chosen niche and start to build an online presence. Doing so can simultaneously help curate a portfolio, which is vital so an artist can show examples of their work to prospective buyers. Adults can also attend continuing education courses, such as night school, to improve techniques or learn new methods.

Professional Certification and Licensure

Those who want to teach fine arts at public elementary or secondary schools usually must have a teaching certificate in addition to a bachelor's degree.

Additional Requirements

Craft and fine artists improve their skills through practice and repetition. They can train in several ways other than, or in addition to, formal schooling. Craft and

fine artists may train with simpler projects before attempting something more ambitious.

Some artists learn on the job from more experienced artists. Others attend noncredit classes or workshops or take private lessons, which may be offered in artists' studios or at community colleges, art centers, galleries, museums, or other art-related institutions.

EARNINGS AND ADVANCEMENT

Earnings depend on the nature of the art being produced, the clientele, the stature of the artist, and whether the artist is self-employed or works for a company. Median annual earnings of craft and fine artists were \$48,760 in 2019. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$22,290, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$106,000.

It is unlikely that craft and fine artists will receive benefits such as paid vacations, holidays, and sick days; life and health insurance; and retirement benefits, unless the artist works for a company.

Competition for jobs as craft and fine artists is expected to be strong because there are more qualified candidates than available jobs. Competition is likely to grow among independent or self-employed artists, given that many of them sell their work in the same online marketplaces. In addition, competition among artists for the privilege of having their work shown in galleries is expected to remain intense.

Because the demand for artwork depends on consumers having extra income to spend, many of these artists will find that their income changes alongside changes in the overall economy. Only the most successful craft and fine artists receive major commissions for their work.

Despite the competition, studios, galleries, and individual clients are always on the lookout for artists who display outstanding talent, creativity, and style. Talented individuals who have developed a mastery of artistic techniques and marketing skills are likely to have the best job prospects.

EMPLOYMENT AND OUTLOOK

Craft and fine artists held 51,900 jobs in 2019. Fifty-one percent were self-employed. Employment is expected to show little or no change through the year 2029. Employment growth for artists depends largely on the overall state of the economy and whether people are willing to spend money on art, because people usually buy art when they can afford to do so. During good economic times, people and businesses are interested in buying more artwork; during economic downturns, they generally buy less. However, there is always some demand for art by private collectors and museums.

Job growth for craft and fine artists may be limited by the sale of inexpensive, machine-produced items designed to look like handmade crafts. A continued interest in locally made products and crafted goods will likely offset some of these employment losses.

Illustrators and cartoonists who work in publishing may see their job opportunities decline as traditional print publications lose ground to other media forms. However, new opportunities are expected to arise as the number of electronic magazines and other Internet-based publications continue to grow.

Related Occupations

- Archivist/Curator/Museum Worker
- Art Director
- Fashion Designer
- Graphic Designer
- Industrial Designer
- Jewelers/Precious Stone and Metal Workers
- Multimedia Artists/Animators
- Photographers
- Woodworkers

MORE INFORMATION

Accrediting Commission for Community and Precollegiate Arts Schools (ACCPAS)

11250 Roger Bacon Drive, Suite 21
Reston, VA 20190-5248

703.437.0700
info@arts-accredit.org
accpas.arts-accredit.org

American Craft Council (ACC)
1224 Marshall Street NE, Suite 200
Minneapolis, MN 55413
612.206.3100
council@craftcouncil.org
www.craftcouncil.org

Art Dealers Association of America (ADAA)
205 Lexington Avenue, Suite #901
New York, NY 10016
212.488.5550
adaa@artdealers.org
artdealers.org

Association of Medical Illustrators (AMI)
201 E. Main Street, Ste. 1405
Lexington, KY 40507
866.393.4264
hq@ami.org
ami.org

College Art Association of America (CAAA)
50 Broadway, 21st Floor
New York, NY 10004
212.691.1051
nyoffice@collegeart.org
www.collegeart.org

Council of Arts Accrediting Associations (CAAA)
11250 Roger Bacon Drive, Suite 21
Reston, VA 20190-5248
703.437.0700
info@arts-accredit.org
www.arts-accredit.org
National Office for Arts Accreditation (NOAA):
www.arts-accredit.org/national-office-for-arts-accreditation

National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA)

1200 18th Street NW, Suite 1100

Washington, DC 20036

202.347.6352

nasaa@nasaa-arts.org

nasaa-arts.org

National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD)

11250 Roger Bacon Drive, Suite 21

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National Endowment for the Arts

400 7th Street SW

Washington, DC 20506

202.682.5400

www.arts.gov

New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA)

20 Jay Street, Suite 740

Brooklyn, NY 11201

212.366.6900

help@nyfa.org

www.nyfa.org



Conversation With...

SCOTT MOORE

Fine Artist, specializing in landscape paintings
Stockton Springs, ME
Years in field, 45 years

What was your individual career path in terms of education/training, entry-level job, or other significant opportunity?

I have a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting from Maine College of Art. My parents were artists when I was growing up. We lived near Washington, DC. My mother was a fashion illustrator for all the major department stores there, and my father was the art director at the Institute of Heraldry, which designed flags, medals, and seals for the US Army. They gave me the idea that an art career was a normal thing to do. I had materials and direction available right at home, which was helpful. We used to go to the National Gallery of Art fairly frequently, and the Hirshhorn Museum. So, there was good art to be seen and creativity there, and I could see the possible modes of expression.

I paint landscapes because I enjoy working outdoors. I've always responded to landscape. A portrait painter has to be somewhat of a courtier, and I'm a little more self-contained.

The first painting I sold was at a sidewalk art show in Portland, Maine, when I was a college student. One of my professors thought I was too inexperienced to be out selling paintings. I was always more geared to try to make a living at it, and I wanted to be self-directed. The only other thing I ever wanted to do was to be an archeologist, and there are fewer jobs for that. So, it was either this, or that.

After college I got a job at a friend's parents' shop as a picture framer. That's a good skill for a painter to have because framing is expensive. I started showing when I was 25, at the frame shop where I worked in a little space there, and then at a co-op gallery, which is a good place when you're just starting out.

It was a gradual process to paint full-time. I've worked in restaurants from time to time, at night so I had the daylight hours to paint. I've pounded nails. I tended to take jobs that didn't absorb too much of my energy, in general, because I wanted it for painting and that's where my focus was. For a lot of my career, I worked six and a half days a week.

I was fortunate enough to be in the right place at the right time. In 1992, there was a big CEO who bought an armload of my paintings and continued to do so. I was making frames then for a gallery that also showed my work. I cut back to working one day a week in framing, but the gallery didn't mind because they were also selling my paintings. Word got around that this CEO was buying a lot of my work, and other people got the idea that maybe they should, too. That's what helped my business the most. There was a period of 6 years where I was making almost all of my income from painting. But up until 1998, for a predictable income, I still worked a few hours a week making frames. Cutting loose of the predictable world entirely was something I was reluctant to do, and only did so at the urging of my wife.

I usually exhibit at between four and six galleries at any one time. I gravitated toward places where I had constant exposure because that's the best way to be seen. I've also been in juried and invitational shows. Some of the significant shows were at the Harvard Club and at the Attleboro Museum. I try to be in the studio from 9 to 5 on weekdays. I generally produce at least one painting a week. But in my 40s, when I was going like gangbusters, I made 100 paintings a year. I'm not quite as vigorous as I was then.

This is a high wire act without a net and no set time limits. It's an exciting way to make a living.

What are the most important skills and/or qualities for someone in your profession?

Persistence is first. You really have to have a lot of desire and a need to do it. A secondary thing is you need to be a reasonable diplomat, good at dealing with patrons and galleries. It's important to pick galleries where people are actually your friends.

What do you wish you had known going into this profession?

The ability to do the art is ultimately what's important. It's not necessarily the degree.

Also, most artists get burned once or twice, where the painting will get sold by a gallery and the check never comes to you. That happened to me twice. There's always a certain element of risk-taking on a gallery because there are fly-by-night galleries out there. Young artists are most likely to be victimized. Since then, I tend to scout out the gallery, and if I know any of the artists, I'll talk to them about their experience there.

Are there many job opportunities in your profession? In what specific areas?

As a painter, you really are starting every day from scratch—to a certain extent. If you're an illustrator, certainly there are jobs available. But commercial artists tend to work for someone else, like advertising agencies, newspapers, or magazines.

How do you see your profession changing in the next 5 years? How will technology impact that change, and what skills will be required?

Technology already has changed art quite a bit already. My daughter is an artist who is embarking on her career. A lot of people are using computers as drafting aids. I haven't done that, but she does rather frequently. More computer literacy will be required for that than I possess.

There probably will be more online sales. I've sold a few things to people who have bought my paintings before, so they know what they are getting. But I've never sold a big painting on-

line to anyone who hadn't bought one face-to-face. Generally online sales are small paintings, on the low end of prices.

The business side is also changing from the traditional gallery exhibiting. Typically, a gallery selects the artists it wants to exhibit and shares a percentage of the art sales. There are some pay-to-play galleries now where artists pay the gallery to let the artists exhibit. This is something that started recently, and I'm sad to see it because it doesn't mean the art is good. It just means the artist can afford to pay for exposure.

What do you enjoy most about your job? What do you enjoy least about your job?

Independence is both the blessing and the curse of it. It's a blessing because I like doing what I do. It's a curse because I don't always know what I should do. Do you need another gallery to exhibit my work? Do you need more outlets? Where should you go? What towns would be good?

The thing that's hardest about it is it's an uncertain trade. If there's a severe economic downturn, one of the first things people stop buying is paintings. I've had a year where I sold more than 100 paintings and a year where I sold 20.

Can you suggest a valuable "try this" for students considering a career in your profession?

Find other painters that are perhaps more schooled than you are and tag along with them if you can. Find someone who teaches and does demonstrations. You don't need to ape their style but it's instructive to see how others deal with creative issues. You can see that there is this process, and that can spark something in you. It's like becoming a better chess player: you want to play with someone better than you are if you can.