Big Artists Survey 2011 – the results

Here are the results of AIR and a-n's largest ever artists' survey. Such surveys are designed to ensure that these key artists' organisations remain 'in touch' with their users' current needs and can respond to those artists are identifying will be important in the future. Thanks to all the artists who valiantly completed all 50 questions – your reward will be in what we do next!

Founded in 2006 and now with a membership in excess of 16,300, AIR – Artists Interaction and Representation is the UK's leading professional body for visual and applied artists. a-n The Artists Information Company's mission is through information and advocacy, to stimulate and support contemporary visual arts practice and affirm the value of artists in society. Ongoing collaboration between a-n and AIR fosters research like this that identifies the new programmes and services that artists say are important in developing their practice and livelihoods.

The 2011 survey provides essential information both for artists actively lobbying for improvements in artists' working conditions support for artists' practice and professional development as well as for policy makers and funders who need insights into artists' current concerns and priority issues.

KEY INFORMATION

Finance

- Artists are entrepreneurial and are developing a wide portfolio practice

Over half the artists surveyed are engaged with arts research, community art, exhibitions, art fairs, festivals, private commissions, residencies, selling or teaching indicating the resourcefulness of practitioners in developing a portfolio of income streams in response to the financial situation

- Artists are increasingly taking up paid employments to support their practice

Comparison with the 2009 AIR survey shows the percentage of entirely self-employed artists has reduced from 72% to 50% over the last two years, with a related increase in the percentage of artists who have secured additional paid employment.

57% of artists generate only 0-25% of their income through their art practice. Almost a third of artists surveyed earned less than £5,000 a year from practice. Average turnover artists made from their practice in their last financial year was approximately £9,000.

Likelihood of being self employed increased with stage of practice, whereas, the likelihood of being a mix of self-employed and employed reduced with stage of practice.

Although 38% of established artists earn 0-25% from practice, 39% of established artists earn 75-100%, implying established artists occupy both extremes of income level.

About a quarter of artists predicted their income in the next year will increase compared to a year ago, approximately quarter it would stay the same, approximately quarter it would decline.

- Digital and Performance artists are most likely to make a loss or no income from their practice

In contrast to other visual arts practices, artists working in digital media or performance are significantly more likely to make a loss or no income from their practice (19% and 17% respectively compared to 9% of all artists)

- Almost a third of artists do not pay for studio space

31% of artists surveyed paid for studio/workshop space, with monthly costs for inclusive of rates and services varied from £25 to £1,400/pcm. 73% of artists who provided figures paid £200 or less pcm. 14% of artists who currently rent studio space think that they will cease to rent a studio in the next 12 months.

- The vast majority of artists have no private pension plans

Only 16% of artists surveyed paid in to private pensions. Given that 50% of artists are self-employed this presents a significant question as to how professional artists will support themselves once they reach retirement age.

Gallery/dealer representation

- Only 15% of artists are currently represented by a gallery or agent

Of the 15% of artists surveyed currently represented by a gallery or agent, 71% define themselves as fine artists and 23% as applied artists. Artists in other media had little or no representation

- Artists living in London amongst those less likely to have gallery representation

Analysis of the number of artists with representation compared against the total number of artists from each region showed that an artist living in London or the South East is less likely to be represented by a gallery than an artist living in Yorkshire & Humberside, Wales or the South West of England.

- Four key areas were revealed that would improve artists' relationships with dealers/agents

Although 75% of artists reported that they had an excellent or good relationship with their gallery agent, artists indicated that relationships with gallery agents could be improved by more prompt payment of commission; improved promotion of the artist's work including gallery shows and art fairs; improved and more frequent communication between artist and dealer; more sale of work and/or less commission

Internet and social networking

- Artists have increased their uptake of social networking and use of new media over the last year.

Comparison of AIR surveys from 2011 and 2010 illustrate that more artists have set up their own website and use of Linked-in, twitter and blogs has increased

Artists' professional development needs

- Artists have identified the range of their professional development needs.

Over 75% of artists identified the key professional development needs as meeting commissioners and curators; help in identifying resources/funding for their projects; access to AIR-endorsed good practice documents; attending networking events to meet other artists and getting ongoing critique of their work.

- AIR and a-n services continue to be important to artists' practice

94% of artists are already using or planning to use the free £5m Public and Products Liability Insurance, 77% the AIR e-bulletin and 67% the Artists Insurance Policy. 71% reading a-n Magazine online (64% in print).

Nearly a quarter had attended artists' events such as AIRTIME and AIR Salons.

- The survey provided insights into new services needed by artists

30% of artists had needed expert financial advice over the last 12 months. Demand for all types of financial advice was most requested by emerging artists who have required advice about business set-up, business budgeting/cash flow, pricing and estimating, tax matters/tax return and loans/business finance.

Although need for legal advice over the last month had not been high amongst all artists surveyed, emerging artists required advice about studio licences/leases, contracts, forming groups/organisations and copyright/IP/Moral rights.

Consultation with artists

- Artists continue to feel that they are not sufficiently represented in decision-making bodies involved in culture

The majority of artists surveyed in 2009 through the NAN Big Survey felt there was not enough artists' representation in decision making bodies. In the last 12 months, three-quarters of artists surveyed had not been consulted by a UK arts funding body and of those living in England less than 1% were a member of a regional Turning Point Network committee.

Nearly half of artists in England said they "did not know at all" about the Turning Point visual arts networks or aims, with 67% saying they would like to see AIR lobby for more

artists to be serving on these networks' committees and to be able to participate in policy-making forums.

Profile of AIR members

- 41% of artists defined themselves as emerging
- 25% as mid-career
- 12% as established
- 23% chose not to define themselves

Contact for interviews or further discussions on the survey's results air.secretariat@a-n.co.uk

Notes

The E-survey of artists with AIR and a-n membership was conducted in July 2011 and published in September 2011. It received 1,457 responses (9% return) and was completed by artists ranging from recent graduates to retired artists with over thirty years of practice, in rural and urban locations in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Respondents could chose to self-define their career stage/length of practice and whether they felt themselves to work within fine art, applied arts, photography, interdisciplinary, digital or media arts

Founded in 2006, AIR – Artists Interaction and Representation is a professional body for visual and applied artists, member of the European Council of Artists (ECA) and DACS appointed organisation for collective licensing For more information including Mission and current activities go to www.air-artists.org