

Freelands Foundation, 2016

Representation of Female Artists in Britain

The following report was commissioned by Freelands Foundation in order to establish current and objective data in relation to the representation of female artists. The intention of the report is to contribute to existing debates, as well as to aid the Foundation in making a philanthropic intervention on the basis of evidence, research and an in-depth understanding of current conditions.

This report began with a question: Are female artists under-represented in Britain? There are many reasons for asking this question.

Charlotte Bonham-Carter

In 2012, East London Fawcett (ELF), a campaign group for equality between men and women, launched the Great East London Art Audit, in order to assess the representation of women in London's art world. The audit carried out by ELF revealed significant inequality. Some of the findings of that report are detailed in the following pages. Following the ELF report, a number of journalists picked up the issue, and examined the representation of women in the art world in further detail. Jennifer Thatcher's article, '50/50', which was first published in [Art Monthly 367: June 2013](#), combined anecdotal evidence of gender inequality in the art world with analysis of the reasons for the declining number of women participating in the art world as they move from graduation from art school to senior positions in the art world.

Evidence from the Great East London Art Audit shows that in 2012–13, despite the many advances made by women in the art world over the years, inequality still persisted. When I began to have informal conversations with female artists,

I found that a surprising number of them voiced concerns about attitudes towards female artists, the lack of support for childcare and maternity leave, and the obstacles that confront women, particularly during the mid-career stage.

Though some things may have improved, four years on from the Great East London Art Audit, the issue of the representation of women in the art world and indeed in business, politics, film, theatre, and many other areas of engagement has not gone away. Recent works by Susan Jones ('Do the Visual Arts Have a Leadership Problem?', [Culture Professionals Network, The Guardian](#), 24 September 2015) and Prof. Kate Oakley and Dr. Dave O'Brien ('Cultural Value and Inequality', commissioned by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, 2015) raise the issue of inequality yet again. In the context of these debates, this report contributes to the existing evidence base around the representation of women in the art world by bringing some aspects of the Great East London Art Audit up to date.

In addition, it looks at the representation of female artists outside London which is surely as important as representation within London and provides data on the percentage of female artists achieving significant career milestones (such as representing Britain at the Venice Biennale or having a solo exhibition at a major museum or gallery).

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Are female artists under-represented?

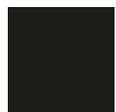
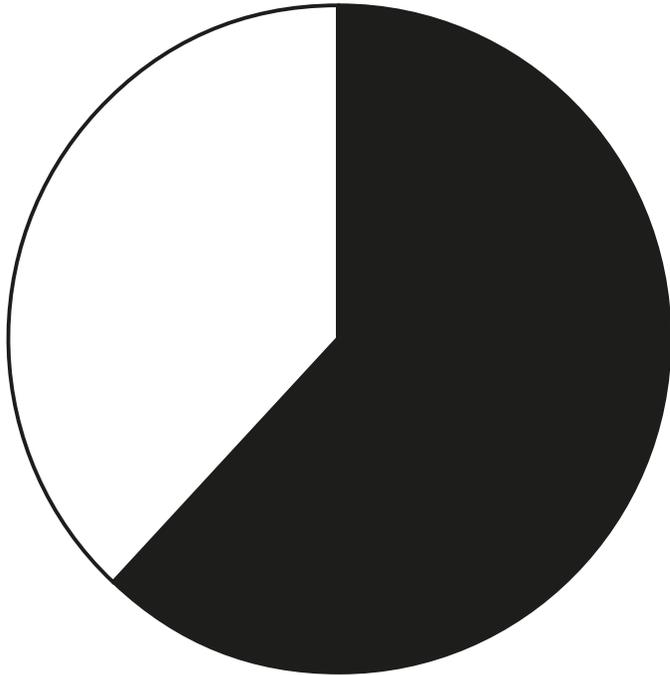
Report Summary

Though female art and design graduates outnumber men, men outnumber women in the majority of activities that signify the development of an artist's career, such as having a solo exhibition at a national museum in London, or at a large-scale gallery outside of London. Indeed, in major career highlights, such as representing Britain at the Venice Biennale, men substantially outnumber women. The representation of female artists has increased over the years, and fairly significantly since the ELF audit in 2012–13, however the data suggests that gender imbalances persist at, and beyond, the mid-career stage.

1. Undergraduate Education

According to the Guardian

62% of undergraduates studying art and design in 2011–12 were female



Female undergraduates

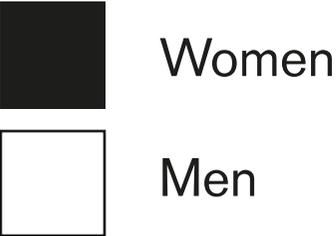
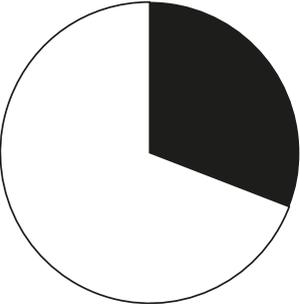


Male undergraduates

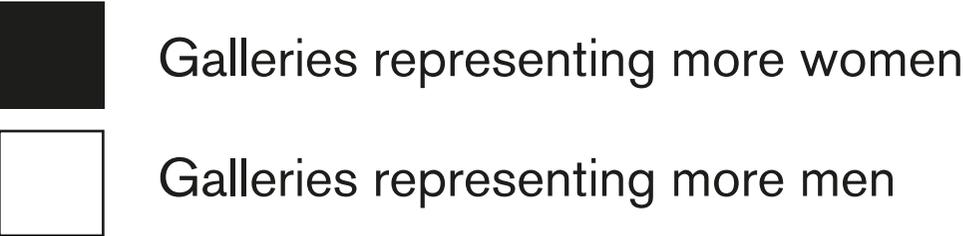
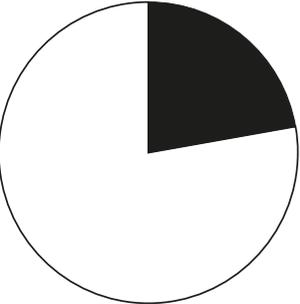
2. Commercial galleries in London

In 2012–13, East London Fawcett (ELF), a campaign group for equality between men and women, conducted an audit of 134 commercial galleries in London, and found that:

31% of the represented artists were women



78% of the galleries represented more men than women



Representation by a commercial gallery in London is a major career achievement, however women feature disproportionately less than men in this area of the commercial market.

The under-representation of female artists is further evidenced by the ELF's finding that there were no women on the list of the top 100 auction performances in 2012.

For many artists, success in the commercial market is fundamental to sustaining a career as an artist.

Solo shows in non-commercial galleries in London

We conducted an audit of solo shows featured in the exhibition programme of 28 non-commercial galleries in London (2014–15), and found that:

42%

of these shows were by female artists

40%

of shows at NPOs and DCMS¹ funded organisations were by female artists

25%

of shows at London's major institutions were by female artists²

Our 2014–15 data shows that 42% of solo shows were by female artists. This is a marked improvement from the ELF 2012–13 audit, which found that just 31% of solo shows were by female artists.

However, our 2014–15 data indicates that the percentage of solo shows by female artists at London's major institutions is only 25%.

Solo shows in non-commercial galleries outside London

We conducted an audit of solo shows featured in the exhibition programme of 43 non-commercial galleries outside London (2014–15) and found that:

40%

of these shows were
by female artists

38%

For NPOs this drops
to 38%

33%

For major institutions outside
London this drops to 33%

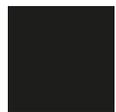
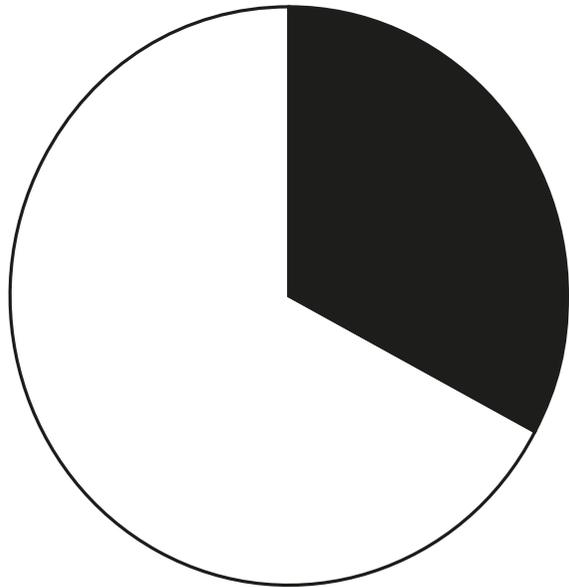
Our 2014–15 data shows that 40% of solo shows at non-commercial galleries outside London were by female artists. However, as found in London, representation of women at major institutions is far less than equivalent.

Only 33% of solo shows at major institutions outside the capital were by female artists.

Artists at the Venice Biennale and the Turner Prize in the UK

Our audit of artists selected to represent Britain at the Venice Biennale over the last ten years found that:

33% of selected artists were women



Female selected artists

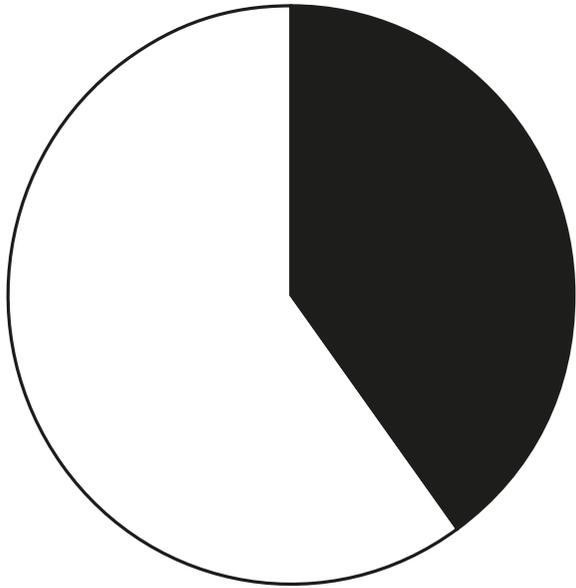


Male selected artists

Artists at the Venice Biennale and the Turner Prize in the UK

Our audit of Turner Prize winners over the last ten years found that:

40% of winners have been female artists



Female winners



Male winners

Representing Britain at the Venice Biennale or winning the Turner Prize are major highlights in an artists career.

And yet, despite the fact that the Guardian reported that 62% of art and design graduates in 2011–12 were female, women are under-represented in these pinnacle achievements.

Despite the many advances made by women in the art world over the years, women are still under-represented in all of the indicators we used to measure career achievement.

Notes on the Methodology

1. ELF Audit – more information about that study can be found online (<https://elartaudit.wordpress.com>) The audit used the New Exhibitions of Contemporary Arts (NECA) listings to derive information about the representation of women in commercial (and non-commercial) galleries in London.
2. Audit of solo shows in the exhibition programme of 28 non-commercial galleries in London – also based on the NECA listings, this report audited solo shows in the exhibition programme of 28 non-commercial galleries in London in the period June 2014 – June 2015. In total, 137 solo shows were examined.

Mixed-sex collaborations were excluded, while same-sex, 2-person collaborations were counted towards the relevant gender. From those 28 organisations, the research identified which institutions were NPOs (in 2014–15) or DCMS grant-in-aid organisations, and how much money they received (in 2014–15). Of the 28 organisations that were initially audited, 19 were NPOs or DCMS funded, and 104 solo shows were examined.

3. Audit of solo shows in the exhibition programme of 43 non-commercial galleries outside London – also based on the NECA listings, this report audited solo shows in the

exhibition programme of 43 non-commercial galleries outside of London, in the period June 2014–June 2015. In total, 199 solo shows were examined. Mixed-sex collaborations were excluded, while same-sex, 2-person collaborations were counted towards the relevant gender. From those 43 organisations, the research identified which institutions were NPOs (in 2014–15), and how much money they received (in 2014–15). Of the 43 organisations that were initially audited, 24 were NPOs, and 118 solo shows were examined.

Notes on the text

1. National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) are the Arts Council England's (ACE) regularly funded organisations. Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) funded organisations, such as Tate and the Victoria and Albert Museum, receive grant-in-aid directly from the DCMS. In this report they are a way of identifying established, government-backed institutions of some standing.
2. In this report, 'major institutions' are defined as organisations in receipt of over £1 million ACE/DCMS funding.

Research

Charlotte Bonham-Carter is the researcher and writer of this report. The report is one of a series of studies undertaken during the development of Freelands Foundation to investigate issues in the arts sector. Charlotte is a published author, curator and academic at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts, London.

The report is copy edited by Sarah Auld, an independent editor and formerly Publications Manager at the Whitechapel Gallery.