

Can you make a living as an artist in Australia? Yes, but it's not as easy as it used to be

Exclusive by the National Reporting Team's [Meredith Griffiths](#)

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-11-13/artists-struggle-to-make-a-living/9142492>

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PHOTO: [Sophie Clague has been forced to take a full-time receptionist job to make ends meet](#) (ABC News: Meredith Griffiths)

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People may pursue the arts for love not money, but how do Australian artists pay their bills?

Key points:

- An Australian artists works a 45-hour week in general
- Artists are required to supplement their income from other jobs
- Women artists earn 44 per cent less than men for their creative work

The Australia Council for the Arts has released [new research which shows the average income of a practising professional artist in Australia](#) declined by about 4 per cent between 2008 and 2015. The report shows in the 2014-2015 financial year artists earned a gross income of \$48,400 on average. That was way below the average income of \$77,121 but above the poverty line of \$22,167.

But to earn that the artists had to supplement their income from other jobs.

Sydney sculptor Sophie Clague knows too well the challenges.

The 29-year-old has been forced to take a full-time receptionist job to make ends meet.

"As an artist, the sporadic nature of the income is a real worry. You can sort of scrimp and save and live in a warehouse but you're not going to be putting anything away for the future because everything you earn you're using for living expenses," she said.

How much money do artists make?

- In 2014-15 Australian artists earned a gross income of **\$48,400 on average**— about 4 per cent less than when the survey was last conducted in 2007-08
- But they tended to generate their income from a **variety of sources**
- On average they made about **\$18,800 from their creative work**, \$13,900 from art-related work (usually teaching), and \$15,700 from a non-arts-related job
- A third of the artists surveyed said they were **happy with that balance**, while the rest wanted to spend more time creating

Sophie earned about \$24,000 last year from a combination of selling artworks, receiving grants and winning an award.

But over the years she's worked as a waitress and in galleries to help pay the bills.

"I do worry about my financial security in the future," she said.

Despite the worries Sophie is determined and spends her weekends and spare time in the studio.

"I can't imagine not sculpting," she said.

The report's author, economist David Throsby from Macquarie University said it was harder to be an artist in Australia than it used to be.

"They're spending more time at the creative work and getting less return for it and so that is something which we observe and which is quite a worry," he said.

Professor Throsby surveyed writers, visual artists, craft practitioners, actors, directors, dancers, choreographers, musicians, singers, composers, songwriters, and community cultural development artists.

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PHOTO: [Despite the worries Sophie is determined and spends her weekends and spare time in the studio.](#) (ABC News: Meredith Griffiths)

'You've got to bite off more than you can chew'

Jess Ciampa is a musician who hasn't had a day off for three months, and won't get one until January.

"If I wasn't earning a living purely from playing I'd think twice about taking some of those jobs, but as a freelance musician you've got to

bite off more than you can chew and chew like crazy, there's just no other way to do it," he said.

Jess has worked as a percussionist for 30 years and has been making money solely from music for the last decade.

Even though his calendar is full, he said the gigs were drying up.

"It's quite stressful being in a job where you've got to do lots of different things to actually make a living," he said.

"I don't think I've ever considered quitting 'cos I can't imagine doing anything else.

"But I have considered, when January and February comes around and things are a bit slow, I often think maybe I should put my name down for some casual teaching at schools."



PHOTO: [Jess Ciampa](#) is a musician who hasn't had a day off for three months, and won't get one until January. (ABC News: Meredith Griffiths)

Gender pay gap wider in the arts

The gender pay gap is especially wide in the arts. Women artists earned 32 per cent less than men overall and 44 per cent less for their creative work.

"The pay gap for artists is worse than in the general workforce and there's no obvious reason why that should be the case," Professor Thorsby said.

"In fact, in some ways one might think there would be more equality in the arts because the arts is a sort [of] socially progressive sector of the economy, and you would have thought that it might be that they might be doing more to overcome the discrimination for women artists."

Sophie has been aware of the pay gap for years.

"I think male artists, when they're pricing their work, maybe they're more confident in putting it for a higher price and that's something even with my work I always under-price my work and then people are like 'No, you have to make it more than that'," she said.

"I think younger guy artists just seem to be more confident so maybe they put themselves out there a bit more."

"Even in commercial galleries, if you look at most commercial galleries in Sydney anyway, they're still overwhelmingly made up of male artists in their stable."

The gender pay gap could explain why more female artists in relationships than male said their partner's income was important to them.

Sophie said she's considered that maybe she wouldn't have children due to her low income.

"Do you wait until you're a bit more established? But then, you might never get established," she said.

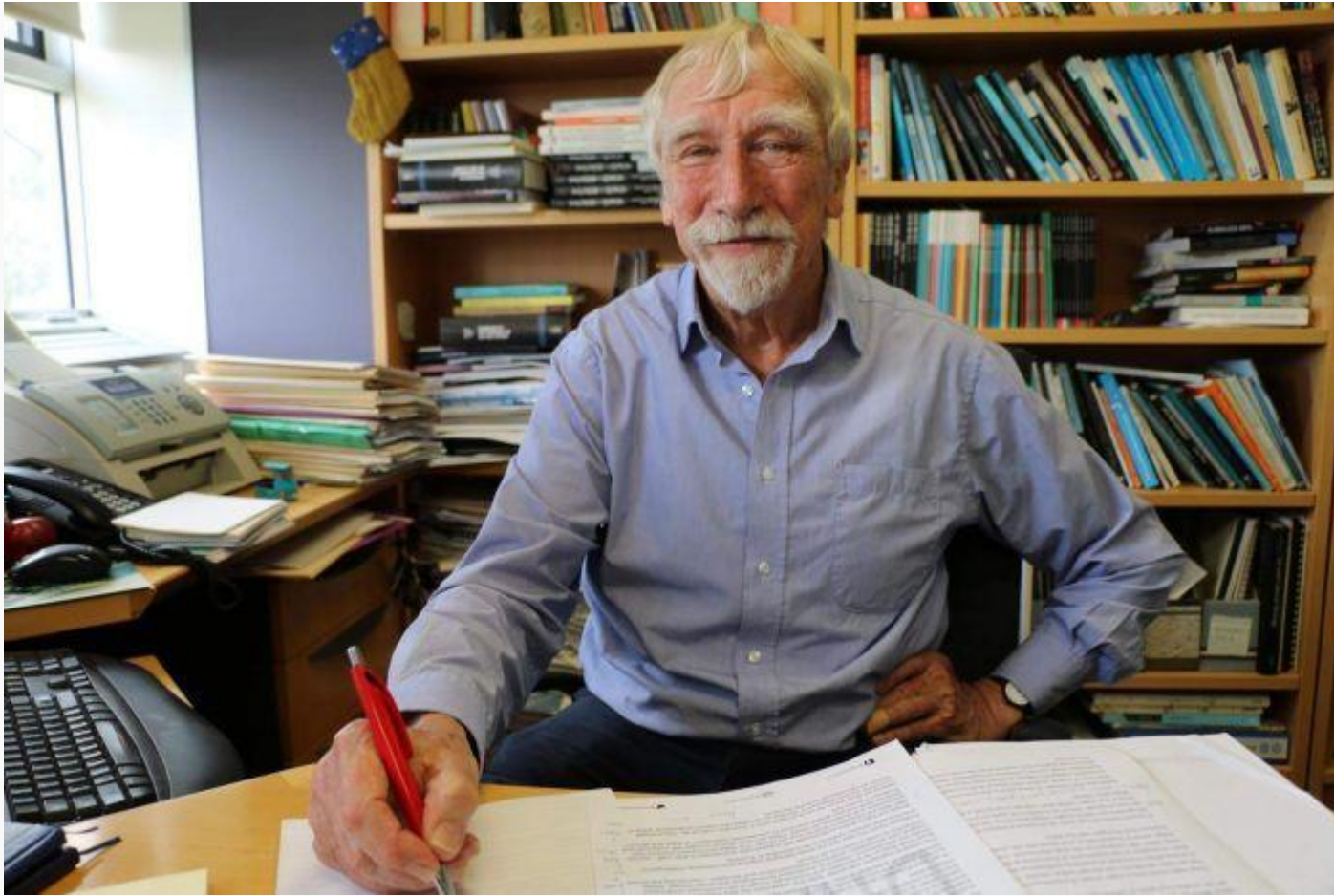


PHOTO: [David Throsby says that artists are spending more time at the creative work and getting less return for it.](#) (ABC News: Meredith Griffiths)

Big changes over 30 years

Professor Throsby has been conducting this survey since 1983 and has seen a lot of change over that time.

"One of the most obvious is the casualisation of the artistic workforce. About 80 per cent [of] artists are freelance, whereas 30 years ago many, many more would have been employees and would have had some prospect of a continuing job," he said.

Over his career, Jess has observed that some organisations that used to hire musicians as staff increasingly began hiring them as sub-contractors, meaning they stopped getting superannuation and had to organise their own public liability insurance.

He estimates he earned about \$50,000 last year. He doesn't have much superannuation and his retirement plan may end up being selling the huge number of instruments filling his garage.

Professor Throsby's report shows increasingly artists do have superannuation or some other means of future financial security, such as personal savings and investments or support, from a partner or family.

The number without any arrangements have fallen dramatically since the previous survey, from 14 per cent to 5 per cent.

However, Professor Throsby said it was worrying that four out of 10 artists did not consider their arrangements to be adequate.

The Australia Council CEO Tony Grybowski said it was a concern that Professor Throsby's research highlights increasing challenges to maintaining a viable career as a professional artist in Australia.

"If we want Australian stories to keep being told and Australia's diverse artistic talent to succeed locally and internationally, we must consider the support structures, protections and remuneration of Australian artists," he said.



PHOTO: [Jess](#) has observed that some organisations that used to hire musicians as staff increasingly began hiring them as sub-contractors. (ABC News: Meredith Griffiths)

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