

# **Artists' livelihoods:**

the artists in arts policy conundrum

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## Abstract

This PhD examines the positioning of visual arts within the creative industries through an in-depth, empirical study of the artistic and personal lives of a discrete number of artists in North West England. It argues that the policy elision of visual arts with the creative industries has resulted in lack of in-depth knowledge of the 'wealth of differences' in motives, intentions, attitudes and personal circumstances of artists as they evolve and pursue livelihoods through art practices over a life-cycle. Although certain Arts Council England policies during 1985-2015 intended to aid artists' livelihoods directly or indirectly, analysis confirms that no real change was effected. Over that period, visual artists have tended to be at an economic disadvantage with low incomes and lack of accessible opportunity undermining their ability to amplify creative processes and sustain livelihoods in the longer-term. The research which draws together primary and secondary sources demonstrates that the art practices of artists are characterised by continuous practice-led 'research and development' fired by deeply-held beliefs and intrinsically-framed values and punctuated by creative interactions within and beyond their immediate artistic disciplinary context and geographical location. The frameworks supportive of artists often remain close to where they reside, encompassing the artistic encouragement and emotional comfort provided by families and individually-framed development and professional relationships. The fine-grain analysis and triangulation with cross-reference to relevant evidence developed within this research has generated a new understanding of the interrelated conditions conducive for, and supportive of, artists' practices and livelihoods including a definition of characteristics of, and parameters for, enabling and facilitating these through arts policies.

Key words: artists' livelihoods, arts policy, cultural labour, contemporary visual arts, resilience, inequality