Craft and Fine Artists

Summary

Fine art painters paint landscapes, portraits, and other subjects in a variety of styles, ranging from realistic to abstract.

Quick Facts: Craft and Fine Artists

| 2012 Median Pay          | $44,380 per year  
|                         | $21.34 per hour  
| Entry-Level Education   | High school diploma or equivalent  
| Work Experience in a Related Occupation | None  
| On-the-job Training     | Long-term on-the-job training  
| Number of Jobs, 2012    | 51,400  
| Job Outlook, 2012-22    | 3% (Slower than average)  
| Employment Change, 2012-22 | 1,300  

What Craft and Fine Artists Do

Craft and fine artists use a variety of materials and techniques to create art for sale and exhibition. Craft artists create handmade objects, such as pottery, glassware, textiles or other objects that are designed to be functional. Fine artists, including painters, sculptors, and illustrators, create original works of art for their aesthetic value, rather than for a functional one.

Work Environment

About half of all craft and fine artists are self-employed; others are employed in various private sector industries or in government.

How to Become a Craft or Fine Artist

Formal schooling beyond a high school diploma is not required for craft and fine artists. However, many artists take classes or earn a bachelor's or master's degree in fine arts, which can improve their skills and job prospects.

Pay

The median annual wage for craft and fine artists was $44,380 in May 2012.

Job Outlook

Employment of craft and fine artists is projected to grow 3 percent from 2012 to 2022, slower than the average for all occupations. Employment growth of artists depends in large part on the overall state of the economy, because purchases of art usually are optional.

Similar Occupations
Craft and fine artists use a variety of materials and techniques to create art for sale and exhibition. Craft artists create handmade objects, such as pottery, glassware, textiles or other objects that are designed to be functional. Fine artists, including painters, sculptors, and illustrators, create original works of art for their aesthetic value, rather than for a functional one.

**Duties**

Craft and fine artists typically do the following:

- Use techniques, such as knitting, weaving, glass blowing, painting, drawing, or sculpting
- Develop creative ideas or new methods for making art
- Create sketches, templates, or models to guide their work
- Select which materials to use on the basis of color, texture, strength, and other qualities
- Process materials, often by shaping, joining, or cutting
- Use visual elements, such as composition, color, space, and perspective, to produce desired artistic effects
- Develop portfolios highlighting their artistic styles and abilities to show to gallery owners and others interested in their work
- Display their work at auctions, galleries, museums and online marketplaces

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, 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.

Fine artists typically display their work in museums, commercial or non-profit art galleries, 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 gallery and the artist decide in advance how much of the sale proceeds each will keep.

Most craft and fine artists spend their time and effort selling their artwork to potential customers and building a reputation. However, only the most successful artists are able to support themselves solely through the sale of their works. 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. For more information on workers...
Craft and Fine Artists specialize in one or more types of art. The following are examples of types of craft and fine artists:

**Cartoonists** draw political, advertising, comic, and sports cartoons. Some cartoonists work with others who create the idea or story and write captions. Some create plots and write captions themselves. Most cartoonists have comic, critical, or dramatic talents, in addition to drawing skills.

**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 special furnaces that dry and harden the clay.

**Fiber artists** use fabric, yarn, or other natural and synthetic fibers 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.

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

**Glass artists** process glass in a variety of ways—such as by blowing, shaping, or joining it—to create artistic pieces. Specific processes used include glassblowing, lampworking, and stained glass. These workers also decorate glass objects, such as by etching or painting.

**Illustrators** create pictures for books, magazines, and other publications, and for commercial products, such as textiles, wrapping paper, stationery, greeting cards, and calendars. Increasingly, illustrators use computers in their work. They might draw in pen and pencil and then scan the image into a computer to be colored in, or use a special pen to draw images directly onto the computer.

**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 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 of human anatomy and surgical procedures, as well as three-dimensional models and animations. 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.

**Printmakers** create images on a silk screen, woodblock, lithography stone, metal etching plate, or other types of matrices. The matrix is then inked and transferred to a piece of paper, using a printing press or hand press to create the final work of art. Workers who do photoengraving are called printing workers.

**Sculptors** design and shape three-dimensional works of art, either by molding and joining materials such as clay, glass, plastic, or 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. For example, some incorporate light, sound, and motion into their works.

**Sketch artists**, a particular type of illustrator, often create likenesses of subjects with pencil, charcoal, or pastels. 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.

**Video artists** shoot and record experimental video that is typically shown on 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**
Craft and fine artists held about 51,400 jobs in 2012.

About half of craft and fine artists are self-employed; others are employed in various private sector industries or in government.

Craft artists, for example, might work for companies that manufacture glass or clay products, or for museums, historical sites, or similar institutions. Fine artists are often employed by newspaper, periodical, book, and directory publishers. They also are employed by colleges and universities. Other types of artists and related workers work for the federal government, motion picture and video production companies, and advertising and public relations firms.

Many artists work in fine art 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.

Studios are usually well-lighted 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 cleaners and other fluids.

**Work Schedules**

Part-time and variable work schedules are common for artists. Many hold another job, in addition to their work as an artist. During busy periods, artists may work overtime to meet deadlines. Self-employed artists can set their own hours.

**How to Become a Craft or Fine Artist**
Craft and fine artists create sketches, templates, or models to guide their work.

Formal schooling is not required for craft and fine artists. However, many artists take classes or earn a bachelor’s or master’s degree in fine arts, which can improve their skills and job prospects.

Education

Formal schooling beyond a high school diploma is rarely required for craft and fine artists. However, it is difficult to gain adequate artistic skills without some formal education in the fine arts.

Most craft and fine artists have at least a high school diploma. High school classes like art, shop, and home economics can teach prospective artists some of the basic skills they will need, such as drawing, woodworking, or sewing.

Many colleges and universities offer bachelor’s and master’s degrees in fine arts. In addition to studio art and art history, programs may include core subjects, such as English, social science, and natural science.

Independent schools of art and design also offer postsecondary training, which can lead to a certificate in an art-related specialty or to an associate’s, bachelor’s, or master’s degree in fine arts.

In 2013, the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) accredited approximately 330 postsecondary institutions with programs in art and design. Most of these schools award a degree in art.

Medical illustrators must have a demonstrated artistic ability and a detailed knowledge of human and animal anatomy, living organisms, and surgical and medical procedures. They usually need a bachelor’s degree combining art and premedical courses. Most medical illustrators, however, choose to get a master’s degree in medical illustration. Four accredited schools offer this degree in the United States.

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 the artist or to buy their work.

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. Advanced degrees in fine arts or arts administration are usually necessary for management or administrative positions in government, management positions in private foundations, and teaching positions in colleges and universities. For more information on workers who teach art classes, see the profiles on kindergarten and elementary school teachers, middle school teachers, high school teachers, and postsecondary teachers.

Important Qualities

Artistic ability. Craft and fine artists create artwork and other objects that are visually appealing or thought-provoking. This usually requires significant skill in one or more art forms.

Business skills. Craft and fine artists must promote themselves and their art to build a reputation and to sell their art. They often study the market for their crafts or artwork to increase their understanding of what potential customers might want. Many craft and fine artists sell their work on the Internet, so developing an online presence is an important part of their art sales.

Creativity. Artists must have active imaginations to develop new and original ideas for their work.
**Customer-service skills.** Craft and fine artists, especially those who sell their work themselves, must be good at dealing with customers and potential buyers.

**Dexterity.** Most artists work with their hands and must be good at manipulating tools and materials to create their art.

**Interpersonal skills.** Artists often must interact with many people, including co-workers, gallery owners, and the public.

**Training**

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 can train with simpler projects before attempting something more ambitious.

Some craft and fine 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.

Still other craft and fine artists work closely with another artist on either a formal or informal basis. Formal arrangements may include internships or apprenticeship programs. Artists hired by firms often start with relatively routine work. While doing this work, however, they may observe other artists and practice their own skills.

**Advancement**

Craft and fine artists advance professionally as their work circulates and as they establish a reputation for their particular style. Many of the most successful artists continually develop new ideas, and their work often evolves over time.

Many artists do freelance work while continuing to hold a full-time job until they are established as professional artists. Others freelance part time while still in school, to develop experience and to build a portfolio of published work.

Freelance artists try to develop a set of clients who regularly contract for work. Some freelance artists are widely recognized for their skill in specialties like cartooning or children’s book illustrations. These artists may earn high incomes and can choose the type of work they do.

**Pay**

The median annual wage for craft and fine artists was $44,380 in May 2012. The median wage is the wage at which half the workers in an occupation earned more than that amount and half earned less. The lowest 10 percent earned less than $19,200, and the top 10
percent earned more than $93,220.

The median annual wages for craft and fine artist occupations in May 2012 were as follows:

- $44,850 for fine artists, including painters, sculptors, and illustrators
- $29,600 for craft artists
- $59,840 for all other artists and related workers

Earnings for self-employed artists vary widely. Some charge only a nominal fee, while they gain experience and build a reputation for their work. Others, such as well-established freelance fine artists and illustrators, can earn more than salaried artists. Many, however, find it difficult to rely solely on income earned from selling paintings or other works of art.

Part-time and variable work schedules are common for artists. Many also hold another job, in addition to their work as an artist. During busy periods, artists may work overtime to meet deadlines. Self-employed artists can set their own hours.

### Job Outlook

Employment of craft and fine artists is projected to grow 3 percent from 2012 to 2022, slower than the average for all occupations.

Employment growth of artists depends in large part on the overall state of the economy, because purchases of art usually are optional. During good economic times, more people and businesses are interested in buying artwork; during economic downturns, they generally buy less.

Although there is always a demand for art by collectors and museums, the employment of artists can be affected by the level of charitable giving to the arts, which has been decreasing somewhat in recent years.

In addition, job growth for craft artists may be limited by the sale of inexpensive, mass-produced items designed to look like handmade American crafts. However, continued interest in locally made products and craft goods sold online will likely offset some of these employment losses.

Demand for illustrators who work on a computer will increase, as media companies use more detailed images and backgrounds in their designs. Illustrators and cartoonists who work in publishing may see 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, Internet-based publications, and video games grows.
Job Prospects

Competition for jobs as craft and fine artists is expected to be strong, because there are more qualified candidates than available jobs. 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 will have the best job prospects.

Competition among artists for the privilege of being shown in galleries is expected to remain intense, as will competition for grants from funders, such as private foundations, state and local arts councils, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Because of their reliance on grants, and because the demand for artwork is dependent on consumers having extra income to spend, many of these artists will find that their income changes with the overall economy and the federal budget.

Employment projections data for Craft and Fine Artists, 2012-22

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Craft and fine artists</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>51,400</td>
<td>52,700</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1,300</td>
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<tr>
<td>Craft artists</td>
<td>27-1012</td>
<td>11,200</td>
<td>11,600</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>400</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fine artists, including painters, sculptors, and illustrators</td>
<td>27-1013</td>
<td>28,800</td>
<td>29,900</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1,100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Artists and related workers, all other</td>
<td>27-1019</td>
<td>11,400</td>
<td>11,200</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-200</td>
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</tbody>
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Similar Occupations

This table shows a list of occupations with job duties that are similar to those of craft and fine artists.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OCCUPATION</th>
<th>JOB DUTIES</th>
<th>ENTRY-LEVEL EDUCATION</th>
<th>2012 MEDIAN PAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archivists, Curators, and Museum Workers</td>
<td>Archivists appraise, edit, and maintain permanent records and historically valuable documents. Curators oversee collections of artwork and historic items, and may conduct public service activities for an institution. Museum technicians and conservators prepare and restore objects and documents in museum collections and exhibits.</td>
<td>See How to Become One</td>
<td>$44,410</td>
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<tr>
<td>Art Directors</td>
<td>Art directors are responsible for the visual style and images in magazines, newspapers, product packaging, and movie and television productions. They create the overall design of a project and direct others who develop artwork and layouts.</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$80,880</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fashion Designers</td>
<td>Fashion designers create original clothing, accessories, and footwear. They sketch designs, select fabrics and patterns, and give instructions on how to make the products they designed.</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$62,860</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Graphic Designers</strong></td>
<td>captivate consumers. They develop the overall layout and production design for advertisements, brochures, magazines, and corporate reports.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bachelor's degree $44,150</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Industrial Designers</strong></td>
<td>Industrial designers develop the concepts for manufactured products, such as cars, home appliances, and toys. They combine art, business, and engineering to make products that people use every day. Industrial designers focus on the user experience in creating style and function for a particular gadget or appliance.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bachelor's degree $59,610</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Jewelers and Precious Stone and Metal Workers</strong></td>
<td>Jewelers and precious stone and metal workers design, manufacture, and sell jewelry. They also adjust, repair, and appraise gems and jewelry.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>High school diploma or equivalent $35,350</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Multimedia Artists and Animators</strong></td>
<td>Multimedia artists and animators create animation and visual effects for television, movies, video games, and other forms of media.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bachelor's degree $61,370</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Photographers</strong></td>
<td>Photographers use their technical expertise, creativity, and composition skills to produce and preserve images that visually tell a story or record an event.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High school diploma or equivalent $28,490</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Woodworkers</strong></td>
<td>Woodworkers manufacture a variety of products such as cabinets and furniture, using wood, veneers, and laminates. They often combine and incorporate different materials into wood.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High school diploma or equivalent $28,440</td>
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</table>

**Contacts for More Information**

For more about art and design and a list of accredited college-level programs, visit [National Association of Schools of Art and Design](http://www.nasad.org)

For more information on careers in the craft arts and for a list of schools and workshops, visit [American Craft Council](http://www.americancraftcouncil.org)

For more information on careers in the arts, visit [New York Foundation for the Arts](http://www.nyfa.org)

For more information on careers in illustration, visit [Society of Illustrators](http://www.societyofillustators.org)

For more information on careers in medical illustration, visit [The Association of Medical Illustrators](http://www.amia.org)

For information on grant-funding programs and other local resources for artists, contact your state arts agency. A list of these agencies is available from the [National Assembly of State Arts Agencies](http://www.nasaa-arts.org)

For more information on how the federal government awards grants for art, visit [National Endowment for the Arts](http://www.nea.gov)