

The Status of Artists in Kansas City

Executive Summary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An active, healthy and growing community of artists can make an enormous difference in the livability and the prosperity of a community. Kansas City's recent emergence as a burgeoning center for arts and culture in the Midwest has become increasingly apparent to the public, with high levels of financial commitment, support to arts institutions and the construction of half a dozen major new capital arts projects. These projects have been embraced by residents, community leaders and arts funders, who see their importance and want to see them succeed. The rapid growth of the arts community is seen by many to be a catalyst for important change, including its impact on the major urban renaissance in downtown Kansas City, Missouri.

Despite the contributions of the arts community, we know comparatively little about the individual artists whose talents, creativity and passion for their work have provided a foundation for this success. National work on the "Artistic Dividend" by Ann Markusen and Greg Schrock¹ has shown a per capita concentration of visual artists in the Kansas City metropolitan area well beyond what one would expect for a region of its size, ranking seventh out of the twenty-nine most populous Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs). The rise of the Crossroads Arts District (referred as the "Midwest Soho" by the New York Times²) is just one indication of the vibrant energy created by this concentration. Yet local research on the arts to date has focused almost exclusively on non-profit arts organizations. There has been no corresponding work or attention devoted specifically to individual artists living and working in Kansas City, examining closely the issues and challenges they face.

The Arts Council of Metropolitan Kansas City and The Charlotte Street Foundation commissioned a new study³ as part of the KC Artist LINC⁴ program to examine the demographic and household conditions of artists in Kansas City in order to better understand the relative state of artists' living and working conditions in the metropolitan area. Using data from the 1990 and 2000 US Census and other sources, the study confirms that Kansas City has become a mid-continent center for artists, where artists have the opportunity to raise families, buy houses and participate as fully-invested members of the community to a degree that they may not be able to elsewhere.

More than 6,000 artists live in the KC metro region, with a combined household income of over \$400 million dollars; more than 5,000 are employed in multiple disciplines and by multiple sectors of the local economy. In addition to the highest concentration of visual artists of any major city between the coasts, there are significant concentrations of artists working in other disciplines, including musicians, composers, actors and performers, writers and authors,

¹ Ann Markusen and Greg Schrock. 2006. "The Artistic Dividend." *Urban Studies*. Volume 43, Number 10, September 2006, pp. 1661-1686(26)

² Hope Glassberg. 2005. "Artists Feel the Squeeze in a Midwest SOHO." *New York Times*. Arts Section, November 29. accessed Jan 2008 at

http://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/29/arts/design/29kayc.html?_r=1&scp=2&sq=Midwest+Soho&st=nyt&oref=slogin

³ Dr. Michael Frisch, AICP and Darren Bohrer. 2008. "The Status of Artists in Kansas City." Kansas City, MO: Arts Council of Metropolitan Kansas City.

⁴ LINC stands for Leveraging Investments in Creativity, a national initiative funded in part by the Ford Foundation. LINC is one of several funders supporting a planning phase for KC Artist LINC.

photographers, and film and multi-media workers. Arts-related occupations such as architecture and design are also well represented in Kansas City.

Among the key findings of the study are the following:

1. **Artists are a significant part of the local economy.** Visual artists alone in 1999 earned almost \$100,000,000, and artist households in 1999 had over \$400,000,000 in income. Artists in Kansas City are much less likely to live in poverty than artists in the rest of the United States. However, income by artist discipline varies in Kansas City just as it does nationally. Visual artists in Kansas City make more than the national average, while performing artists make less. Writers and musicians in Kansas City earn about the national average. Artists in Kansas City are much more likely to be employed by the private sector than artists in the rest of the country.
2. **Artists have a high quality of life in Kansas City.** The median income for artist households in Kansas City is about the same as the national average, but Kansas City's relative low cost of living means that their income goes farther. Most artist households in Kansas City spend significantly less on housing than artist households nationally spend. Kansas City artists are more likely to own their home and have two vehicles available in their household. Compared to artists nationally, Kansas City artists are much more likely to live in a single-family home and to live in a new structure. From 1995-2000, more artists moved into the Kansas City region than moved away.
3. **It is hard to be self-employed as an artist in Kansas City.** Kansas City lags behind the nation in the number of self-employed artists in most of the disciplines. Income for self-employed artists is less in Kansas City than it is in the rest of the United States. Self-employed artist renters face a similar economic squeeze to that faced by self-employed artist renters across the United States.
4. **Kansas City is a place where artists can raise families.** Artists in Kansas City are more likely to be married and have children. Kansas City has proportionately more women represented in artist occupations. Artists with families move to Kansas City from other places.
5. **Within the region, artists are concentrated in Kansas City, MO, south of the river; however, the number of artists living in Johnson County, KS is increasing.** Artists and employees in art-related occupations tend to concentrate in the city of Kansas City, MO, south of the river. However, artists moved to Johnson County during the 1990s at an increasing rate. Significant numbers of artists now live in Johnson County, KS.
6. **Arts occupations are keeping up with the Kansas City economy.** Analysis of the numbers of artists back to 1990 and ahead to the latest data available for 2006 show that artists continue to be an important part of the local economy. Arts occupations tend to grow at rates similar to the economy as a whole.

7. **Kansas City lags in terms of artists with graduate degrees.** Kansas City artists are more likely than artists nationally to have graduated high school and college. However, the region lags in terms of artists with graduate degrees. Migration data shows that Kansas City loses a significant number of young artists.

8. **Different generations and disciplines of artists have different characteristics and face different challenges.** Demographic characteristics of artists can vary significantly among artists of different ages and disciplines. For example, Kansas City artists from ages 25 to 34 are almost 50% more likely to be married than their counterparts nationally. Half of Kansas City's musicians are employed by religious organizations, a much higher proportion than the national average. Performing artists in Kansas City tend to make less money than those working in these disciplines nationally, while writers and authors tend to make more.

The report primarily analyzed raw data from the 1990 and 2000 decennial census of population and housing, as well as data on artists from other published reports. The method used by the analysis in the report captures hard data on artists who report their employment as artists. The report does not represent results from artists who have another primary occupation.

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[A copy of the complete report can be found on the Arts Council website at <http://www.artskc.org/FileLibrary/Publication/30/FrischBohrerFEB2008.pdf> and on the Charlotte Street Foundation website at www.CharlotteStreet.org.]