

Artist

Business Opportunity Profile

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Introduction

Artists use their creative skills to produce paintings, drawings and sketches, usually on canvas and paper. Some frame their own pieces of work, while others use specialist printers to feature their work on notebooks, calendars and postcards.

Many artists start up by developing their hobby into a part-time business and work from a home-based studio or rented space in a local craft or arts centre. More established artists who trade on a full-time basis typically have their own studio or gallery.

This profile provides information about starting up and trading as an artist. It describes the training available, the current market trends and the key trading and legal issues.

Training and resources

The following courses are suitable for artists who want to develop their hobby into a business:

- Business Start Up for Creatives, which is a two-day course provided by Central Saint Martins at the University of the Arts in London. The course costs £390 to £440 and covers topics such as market research, writing a business plan, identifying a market, costing and pricing, and legal issues. Go to www.arts.ac.uk/subjects/business-and-management-and-science/short-courses/entrepreneurship-and-innovation/business-start-up-for-creatives-short-course-csm for more details.
- Creative Entrepreneurship, which is a two-day course also provided by Central Saint Martins. The course costs £390 and covers networking, finding opportunities and presentation skills. Go to www.arts.ac.uk/subjects/business-and-management-and-science/short-courses/entrepreneurship-and-innovation/creative-entrepreneurship-short-course-csm for more information.
- Managing a Successful Gallery and Studio Practice, which is an online course held over ten weeks by City St George's, at the University of London. The course costs £495 and covers issues relating to the management of an artist's practice, such as copyright, marketing, pricing structures, arts fairs and contracts and agreements. Go to www.citystgeorges.ac.uk/prospective-students/courses/short-courses/managing-a-successful-gallery-and-studio-practice for more information.
- A range of online and virtual courses from Christie's Education that provide course participants with an in-depth knowledge of all aspects of the art business, with sessions presented by specialist artists, curators, auctioneers, dealers and valuers. Go to

<https://education.christies.com/online/courses/continuing-education/online-courses> for more information and prices.

- Framing courses accredited by the Fine Art Trade Guild and delivered by training providers across the UK. Go to www.fineart.co.uk/group/accredited-framing-courses-4.aspx for a list of Guild-accredited training providers.

Industry resources

There are various online resources to help artists develop their knowledge and skills, including:

- 'Paint & Create' (<https://community.saa.co.uk/paint-magazine>), which is a magazine published by the SAA (Society for All Artists).
- 'Art Monthly' (www.artmonthly.co.uk), which is a magazine published ten times a year that includes news and features, as well as event listings.
- Axis (<https://axisweb.org>), which is an online resource for contemporary artists in the UK.
- Arts Professional (www.artsprofessional.co.uk), which is an online news resource providing information about legislative changes that affect the arts sector, as well as a discussion forum.
- a-n The Artists Information Company (www.a-n.co.uk/news), which is an online resource featuring news, a knowledge bank and details of opportunities for artists.

Key market issues and trends

Current market issues affecting established and start-up artists include the following:

- The UK Visual Artists' Earnings and Contracts' report published by DACS (the Design and Artists Copyright Society), revealed that in 2024, the average annual income for self-employed visual artists was £12,500, which is 40% less in real terms than in 2010. More than half of visual artists also have part-time jobs, but even with additional income, the average earnings for visual artists was still just £17,500. Around 80% of artists described their earnings as 'unstable' or 'very unstable' (www.dacs.org.uk/news-events/earning-half-the-minimum-wage-new-report-reveals-pressures-on-artists-to-sustain-creative-life).
- The same DACS report also revealed that private sales were considered the most important source of earnings for artists. This is followed by traditional art markets. Other sources of earning include social media, teaching and funded projects (www.dacs.org.uk/news-events/earning-half-the-minimum-wage-new-report-reveals-pressures-on-artists-to-sustain-creative-life).
- A 2024 study by Hiscox found that 40% of art collectors and 67% of art enthusiasts anticipate that more people will buy AI-generated art. However, most collectors (82%) and over three-quarters (76%) of enthusiasts want clearer distinctions between human-created works and those generated by AI (www.hiscoxgroup.com/news/press-releases/2024/19-09-24).

- In 2024, creative industry organisations called for a Smart Fund to be set up to ensure that creators, including artists, are paid fairly for their work when it is accessed, distributed and stored on digital devices. The fund will require manufacturers of electronic devices which copy, store and share creative content to contribute a fraction of the value of each device they sell into a fund to support creatives. Similar schemes are already set up in 45 countries around the world (<https://thesmartfund.co.uk>).
- The 2024 DACS report revealed that more than half of artists have noticed negative post-Brexit changes in demand for their work in the UK or EU. Around 26% of artists have found it more difficult to work abroad due to increased expenses and visa/work permit requirements (https://cdn.dacs.org.uk/uploads/documents/UK-Visual-Artists_A-survey-of-earnings-and-contracts.pdf).

Trading, commercial and legal issues

Start-up and established artists face the following trading, commercial and legal issues:

Professional bodies

Joining a professional body can provide a wide range of individual and business benefits, including the opportunity to display artwork at exhibitions or during 'open studio' events.

- The SAA (Society for All Artists, www.saa.co.uk) is a membership organisation that represents artists at all levels. Membership benefits include discounts on art materials, a subscription to the magazine 'Paint & Create', specialist artwork insurance, a page on the SAA website, and tax, accountancy and legal helplines. Membership costs around £50 per year.
- a-n The Artists Information Company (www.a-n.co.uk) is a membership body that supports contemporary visual art in the UK. Membership for an individual artist costs £38 per year. Benefits include networking opportunities and professional development tools and insurance.
- The Pastel Society (www.thepastelsociety.org.uk), which is affiliated to the Federation of British Artists, is a membership association representing artists who specialise in using pastels. Membership is awarded by election, and applicants must submit their work to two consecutive annual exhibitions run by the society. Applicants whose work is selected for exhibition will be required to submit a further portfolio of work.

Studio premises

Most artists start up from a home-based studio. Once established, they typically move into rented studio space in local craft or design centres and other managed workspaces.

The Flexible Space Association has a directory of managed workspaces and studios at www.flexsa.co.uk/search-results. Craft Courses lists coworking studios and venues that artists and makers can rent at www.craftcourses.com/categories/coworking-studios-and-creative-venues-for.

Reproductions and prints

Many artists sell reproductions of their original artwork or limited-edition prints. Examples of specialist printers which artists can use to create prints include:

- dStudio (<https://dstudiouk.com>).
- Skylight Publishing (www.skylightpublishing.com).
- The Print Space (www.theprintspace.co.uk).

Some artists also sell greeting cards, calendars and notebooks which feature their original artwork. Examples of specialist stationery printers that provide short print runs include:

- Green Gift Cards (www.greengiftcards.co.uk).
- JamJar Print (<https://jamjarprint.co.uk>).
- Pixartprinting (www.pixartprinting.co.uk/digital-litho-printing/printing-other-formats).

Copyright protection

Under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, artists automatically own the copyright in any piece of work they create and do not have to pay or register for protection.

Under the Act, the copyright of 'computer-generated works', which include AI-generated artwork, is also protected. However, the copyright ownership of AI-generated art is unclear, with the terms and conditions of some AI-powered software stating that the creator of the software owns the copyright rather than the artist who created it. Go to https://pec.ac.uk/blog_entries/copyright-protection-in-ai-generated-works for more information about copyright and AI.

Online marketplaces

Many artists list their work via online marketplaces such as:

- Artsy (www.artsy.net), which charges artists a commission based on a percentage of the sale price.
- The British Art Club (www.britishartclub.co.uk), where artists can create an online portfolio and sell their work free of commission from around £3 per month.
- Etsy (www.etsy.com/uk/sell), which charges listing fees of 15p per item (based on a billing for \$0.20), a 6.5% transaction fee per sale and a 4% plus 20p fee for payment processing.
- Folksy (<https://folksy.com/selling>), which provides a basic account and charges a listing fee of 15p plus VAT per item and sales commission of 6% plus VAT.
- Not On The High Street (www.notonthehighstreet.com/pages/why-sell-with-us), which charges a one-off joining fee of £199 plus VAT and commission on sales made via the website of 25% plus VAT.

- Amazon Handmade (<https://sell.amazon.co.uk/programmes/handmade>), which charges a referral fee of around 12% for each item sold.

Working with galleries

Once established, some artists display and sell their work in local art galleries. There are several different types of commercial agreement an artist can have with a gallery. Examples include:

- A **consignment agreement**, where the artist supplies their work to the gallery for them to sell, without the gallery having to buy the art outright. This is also known as a **sale-or-return agreement**.
- An **exhibition agreement**, where the gallery owner holds a one-off exhibition for the artist and negotiates sales on their behalf, taking an agreed commission on each sale.
- A **long-term representative agreement**, which usually covers exhibitions, art and craft fairs, sales of work held in stock and arranging new commissions.

There is further guidance on agreements between galleries and artists at www.artbusinessinfo.com/a-guide-to-art-dealers-galleries.html and <https://artquest.org.uk/artlaw-article/contracts-with-galleries>.

The artist's resale right

The artist's resale right gives artists and their beneficiaries a right to a payment (royalty) every time their work is resold for £1,000 or more with the involvement of an art gallery, auction house or dealer.

Artists cannot collect royalties directly but must instead join a collecting society such as DACS. Collecting societies monitor sales and resales of artists' work, collect royalties on artists' behalf and distribute them to artists, minus a fee to cover the society's costs.

More information about the artist's resale right can be found at www.dacs.org.uk/artists-resale-right.

Health and safety

Artists who have their own studio or gallery that customers can visit will need to comply with a range of health and safety responsibilities. These include:

- Identifying and assessing work-related risks (www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/index.htm).
- Assessing fire safety risks (www.hse.gov.uk/fireandexplosion/fire-safety.htm).
- Running events safely (www.hse.gov.uk/event-safety/running.htm).

Promoting the business

Opportunities for artists to promote themselves and their work include:

- Submitting work to online galleries that feature the work of emerging artists, such as Saatchi Art (www.saatchiart.com) and ArtGallery.co.uk (www.artgallery.co.uk).
- Taking part in Open Studio and Art Trail events that encourage the public to visit art installations, artists' studios, public art and galleries in their local area. Examples include <https://chichesteropenstudios.org>, <https://camopenstudios.org> and www.northeastopenstudios.co.uk.
- Submitting work to The Royal Society of British Artists (www.therba.org), which holds regional, national and international exhibitions of artists' work.
- Setting up a Facebook, Instagram or TikTok shop, where customers can browse and buy items (www.shopify.com/uk/facebook-instagram).
- Selling at art fairs, Christmas markets and other local craft events. Stallfinder (www.stallfinder.com) is a directory of stalls available at events around the UK. A list of craft fairs in the UK is available at www.ukcraftfairs.com.

Own Art scheme

The 'Own Art' scheme (www.ownart.org.uk) provides interest-free loans to encourage people to buy original art and to make buying and collecting art easier and more affordable. Under the scheme, customers in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland are provided with an interest-free loan of between £100 and £25,000, subject to credit status, which is repayable by direct debit over 10 or 20 monthly instalments.

Collectorplan is a similar scheme operating in Wales, with a maximum loan of £5,000. Go to <https://collectorplan.arts.wales/collectorplan/collectorplan-homepage> for more information.

Insurance

An artist requires several types of insurance cover, including:

- Public liability insurance, which covers the artist against claims for compensation from customers, suppliers and members of the public injured or adversely affected by their activities.
- Professional indemnity insurance, which covers an artist against claims of breach of copyright.
- Legal expenses insurance, which provides cover for defending disputes with galleries, online marketplaces, landlords, customers and suppliers.
- Premises and contents insurance, which provides cover for the artist's studio, equipment and finished pieces of work against accidental damage, fire, flood or theft.
- Exhibition insurance to cover an artist's work while it is displayed in art galleries.

Specialist insurance for artists is available from insurers and brokers such as AXA (www.axa.co.uk/business-insurance/artists-insurance) and Protectivity

(www.protectivity.com/product/artist-insurance).

Legislation

This section provides an at-a-glance alphabetical list of the key legislation that artists must comply with.

- The Artist's Resale Right Regulations 2006 give UK artists an automatic legal right to receive a royalty when their works are resold.
- Under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, the copyright of original works created by artists is protected by law. Artists must also ensure that they avoid infringing the copyright of others, for example by not plagiarising or reproducing other artists' work without proper permission or licence.
- The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 place statutory duties on employers and the self-employed in relation to the health, safety and welfare of their employees and anyone else affected by their business activities, such as customers, suppliers and members of the public.

Related factsheets

SEC019 Art, Craft and Design - Sector Update

SEC036 Arts and Culture - Sector Update

SYN014 Creative Industries - Industry Snapshot

BOP001 Photographer

BOP115 Art Gallery

BOP177 Illustrator

BOP526 Art and Craft Club

MBP177 Mural Artist

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