

Dear Viewer,

We are a collective of artists, designers, makers, technologists, curators, architects, educators, and analysts who ask:



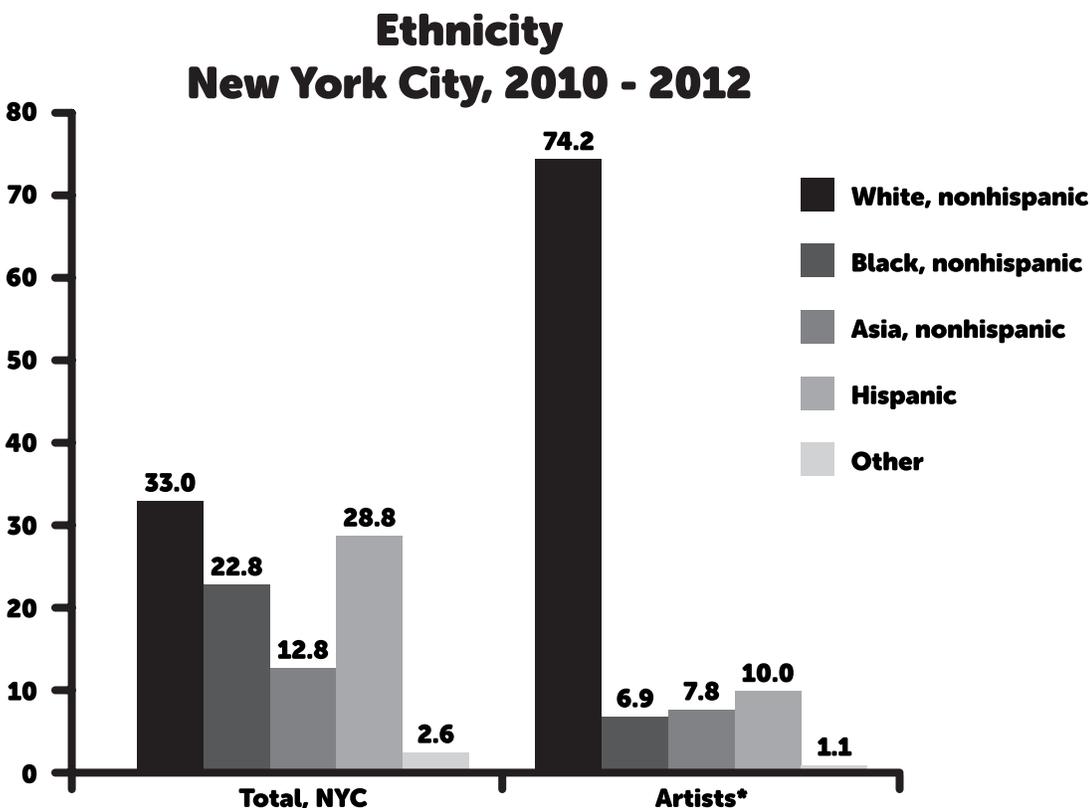
### What is a work of art in the age of \$120,000 art degrees?

The 2000 United States Census revealed that there are more people who identify their primary occupation as “artist” than as lawyer, doctor, or police officer combined. And each year, our schools graduate another 100,000 students with arts-oriented BFAs, MFAs, and PhDs. Since 7 of the 10 most expensive schools in the country are art schools, artist-graduates live with unprecedented debt burdens. Looking at the Census Bureau’s 2010–2012 American Community Survey, BFAMFAPhD Census Report shows that most artists (85%) in New York City have non-arts-related day jobs. Only 15% of people with arts degrees in New York City make a living from their work. Artists who are lucky enough to make a living in New York City (and these are mostly people without arts degrees) have median earnings of \$25,000 a year. This is one-half of the annual median earnings of other professionals. With elite art schools charging \$120,000 for an art degree, and with tuition rising at public universities, both artists and culture are under threat.

Often legitimized by its relationship to elite institutions of higher education, a work of art today is a product of the classroom, the loan repayment, the lecture-hall, and the homework assignment. But before the 1950s, becoming an artist had nothing to do with a BFA or an MFA. As Mark McGurl points out in *The Program Era*, what is novel about our time is not that it’s hard to make a living as an artist (that has always been the case), but that so many young people go to school, and often to expensive art schools, to try to become artists.

### Who goes to art school, and who makes a living as an artist?

The Census Bureau’s 2010–2012 American Community Survey shows that artists are more than twice as likely to be White, nonhispanic, as New York City’s population at large!



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 - 2012 American Community Survey Public Use - Microdata Sample

\*Artist occupations include: Producers and Directors, Writers and Authors, Artists and Related Workers, Musicians and Singers, Photographers, Actors, Dancers and Choreographers, Entertainers



- New York City's population is 33% White, nonhispanic, but 74% of people in the city with arts degrees are White, nonhispanic, and 74% of people who make a living as artists are White, nonhispanic.
- New York City's population is 23% Black, nonhispanic, but only 6% of people in the city with arts degrees are Black, nonhispanic, and only 7% of people who make a living as artists are Black, nonhispanic.
- New York City's population is 29% Hispanic, but only 8% of people in the city with arts degrees are Hispanic, and only 10% of people who make a living as artists are hispanic.
- New York City's population is 13% Asian, nonhispanic, but only 10% of people in the city with arts degrees are Asian, nonhispanic, and 8% of people who make a living as artists are Asian, nonhispanic.
- New York City's population is 13% asian (non-hispanic), but only 10% of people in the city with arts degrees are asian (non-hispanic), and 8% of people who make a living as artists are asian (non-hispanic).
- Of the people who identified their primary occupation as artist in the 2010-2012 American Community Survey in New York City, 55% were male, even though only 42% of people with art degrees are men.
- As the National Endowment for the Arts' report Artists in the Workforce reminded us in 2011: "Women artists earn \$0.81 cents for every dollar earned by men artists. This gap is similar to that in the overall labor force (where women earn \$0.80 cents for every dollar earned by men); professional women earn even less -- \$0.74 for every dollar earned by professional men."

If education and freedom of expression are human rights necessary for a democratic society, we must support artists who self-organize alternative institutions for art education while we struggle to retain the remaining institutions that provide free and low cost art education in this country.

While we work to resist, rethink, and reform the dominant, inequitable art/world, we also join and support New York City's artist-activists, artist-organizers, artist-run spaces, sweat-equity theaters, gift economies, barter economies, producer cooperatives, worker cooperatives, prison abolitionists, radical histories, community archives, community land trusts, and solidarity economy initiatives. Experience and data indicate that few of us will get invited into elite racist and sexist institutions, and that even if we do, we will not receive enough financial capital from these elite spaces to repay our student loans or produce our work. Knowing this, we consider elite invitations with caution while building art worlds that we want to see.

**BFAMFAPhD** Core organizers Susan Jahoda, Blair Murphy, Caroline Woolard

**ABOUT US** Concerned about the impact of debt, rent, and precarity on the lives of creative people, BFAMFAPhD has emerged to make media and connect viewers to existing organizing work. We are artists, educators, curators, art historians, designers, makers, statisticians, and computer engineers who want to understand the relationship between our lives and the bigger picture. We ask questions about equity in the arts using the Census Bureau's 2010-2012 American Community Survey (ACS), and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. On our website, visitors can download our datasets, make media with us, and connect that media to lived experience. We aim to demonstrate that the personal is political. For more information on the conditions of working artists today, see national reports like the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project, Creative New York, and Artists in the Workforce as well as artist-initiated reports—including recent surveys made by W.A.G.E., The Present Group, Gallery Tally, and Who Pays Artists. In these reports, be wary of claims about "artists" that include designers, as designers' high earnings throw off the median earnings of "artists." Artist-driven surveys provide the narrative - the anecdote - but they do not represent the population at large. It is only the large, randomly drawn U.S. household surveys such as the ACS, replete with sampling and nonsampling error, where claims about the population at large can be made. See more at: <http://BFAMFAPhD.com>