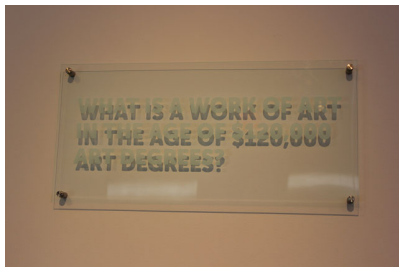


HYPERALLERGIC

ARTICLES

Report Finds NYC's Art World 200% Whiter Than Its Population [UPDATED]

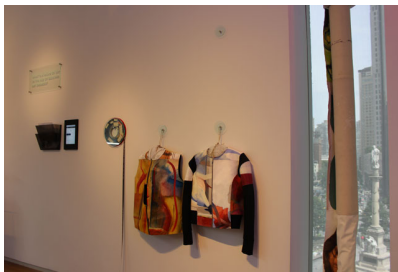
Jillian Steinhauer June 30, 2014



Caroline Woolard, 'Statements,' ongoing series of etched office plaques, on view in 'NYC Makers' (photo courtesy the Museum of Arts and Design)

With the [Whitney Biennial](#), the withdrawal of the Yams Collective, and questions of race fresh in our minds, the Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) opens its new biennial, [NYC Makers](#), tomorrow. Included is a project that offers another stark reminder of the imbalanced demographics of the art world: [Census Report](#), produced by the collective [BFAMFAPhD](#). Consider this,

undoubtedly their most striking finding: New York City's formally educated arts world (in this case defined roughly as working artists and those with arts degrees) appears to be 200% whiter than its general population.



Installation view of BFAMFAPhD's work in 'NYC Makers,' with Lika Volkova's "Disclaim Bolt N.14.6" in the foreground (photo courtesy the Museum of Arts and Design) ([click to enlarge](#))

Organized by artists Susan Jahoda and Caroline Woolard and curator Blair Murphy, BFAMFAPhD (BFA, MFA, and PhD mashed together) is a group of people ("artists, designers, makers, technologists, curators, architects, educators, and analysts") examining debt, rent, and other financial pressures in the lives of artists and creators, with a particular focus on the increasing professionalization of artistry and attendant student debt. In the lead-up to the *NYC Makers* show, BFAMFAPhD members Vicky Virgin (an interdisciplinary artist and demographic analyst) and Julian Boilen (a creative technologist) have drawn on the US Census

Bureau's 2010–2012 American Community Survey to create their own Census Report that looks specifically at the demographics and lives of artists in New York City (available [online](#) and on view on an iPad at MAD).

In the [introductory text](#) on their website (written by Woolard, Murphy, and Jahoda), BFAMFAPhD offers a series of statistics that may stun even the most politically minded art-worlders. Importantly, however, they draw not just on race or ethnicity alone, but on the two combined — a categorization that's termed “mutually exclusive race and ethnicity,” Virgin explained to Hyperallergic.

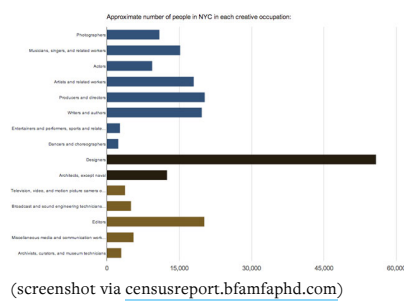
- New York City's population is 33% white non-Hispanic, but 74% of people in the city with arts degrees are white non-Hispanic and 74% of people who make a living as artists are white non-Hispanic.
- New York City's population is 23% black non-Hispanic, but only 6% of people in the city with arts degrees are black non-Hispanic, and only 7% of people who make a living as artists are black non-Hispanic.
- New York City's population is 29% Hispanic (of any race), 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 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.

To say, in light of this, that the art world has a [diversity problem](#) seems like a comical understatement.

They also include this gender-related figure, which aligns with what artist Micol Hebron told us about MFA programs [earlier](#) this year:

- “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.”

(For more on art degrees and gender, see Ann Chen's BFAMFAPhD data visualizations [here](#).)



From there, you can dig into the actual Census Report, which is both user-friendly and fascinating. In the section labeled “[Artist](#),” the group breaks down how they’ve defined artists for the purposes of the report: either by primary occupation or by bachelor’s degrees. The latter seems like a much iffier/less accurate indicator, but it does offer a glimpse of the much-

discussed and lamented education bubble: there are 168,413 adults with art-related bachelor’s degrees (including Art History and Criticism) in New York City.

In two other sections of the report, “[Poverty Rates](#)” and “[Rent Burden](#),” you can explore how artists in the city compare to other inhabitants in these categories. On the whole, a much lower percentage of artists live in poverty than average NYC residents, and artists’ rent burden aligns fairly closely with everyone else’s. But the most interesting feature of these two sections is that you can filter the data by gender, borough, race, and education level to see how it plays out in different ways. Asian artists are more likely to be rent burdened than their non-artist peers, for instance, and whereas 14.1% of black male artists live in poverty, only 6.5% of white male artists do.

(screenshot via censusreport.bfamfaphd.com)

The final feature of the report is a [sweeping chart](#) that shows the kind of jobs NYC residents with arts degrees are working. Although somewhat

difficult to read, the chart does offer telling moments — e.g. of all the people who reported having Studio Arts degrees, not a one of them makes a living as an artist (versus 22% of those with Music degrees). Overall, only 15% of those with arts degrees in NYC are making their living as artists, and NYC artists’ median earnings are a depressingly meager \$25,000. To put that in perspective: it won’t even pay for [one year of art school](#).

BFAMFAPhD’s [Census Report](#) is available online and on view as part of [NYC Makers: The MAD Biennial](#), which opens at the Museum of Arts and Design (2 Columbus Circle, Manhattan) tomorrow, July 1.

Update, 7/1, 11:55am EDT: Some of the statistics originally reported in this article were mischaracterized based on incomplete data: all of the racial figures are based on mutually exclusive race and ethnicity categories, e.g. “white non-Hispanic” rather than simply “white.” Additionally, the \$25,000 median amount earned by those making a living as artists was mislabeled as income (money earned from all sources) rather than earnings (wages from a job), and misattributed only to those people with arts degrees, rather than all artists.

Virgin sent Hyperallergic this statement offering further explanation of her methodology as well as the limits of the report:

The BFAMFAPhD Census Report is a compilation of data collected by the American Community Survey (ACS). This is an annual survey that is designed to sample one percent or about 3 million households in the U.S. The ACS collects detailed socio-economic data that was previously collected in the long form of the Decennial Census. So while timeliness is gained in the yearly data produced by the ACS, the sample size is smaller meaning that the issue of sampling error becomes more important.

For this study we use the Public-Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), a subset of the full ACS sample. In New York City, this translates into a robust sample of roughly 25,000 households providing data on such things as household composition, income, employment and occupation.

A myriad of issues arise when using these data to study artists. First and foremost is the definition of an artist. For this project we use two variables to identify this population: "occupation" defined as the primary occupation (secondary occupation is not collected in this survey) and "field of degree", a relatively new variable asked of those who have a bachelor's degree. The occupation variable identifies only persons who are "making a living" as an artists. Those with an art degree, the larger population, are persons who are working not only in artist occupations but also as teachers, waitresses, salespersons, etc.

For the record, this data project was overseen by Vicky Virgin, demographic analyst, dancer, and choreographer. In 1987 she moved to NYC to dance, supporting herself with the B.S. she had received in economics. In this study she would have been missed in both metrics – with a primary occupation as a demographic analyst and economics as the field of degree. In the meantime, she continues to live in NYC creating art and crunching numbers.

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