

IT TAKES A REGION TO RAISE AN ARTIST

UNDERSTANDING THE EAST MIDLANDS'
VISUAL ARTS ECONOMY

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CVAN EM is the Contemporary Visual Arts Network for the East Midlands. Its remit is to support, strengthen and develop the visual arts sector in the region. CVAN EM was created in 2008, in response to Arts Council England's *Turning Point* (2006) a strategy for the visual arts. However, in the last decade, the climate for public arts funding has changed dramatically, commercial opportunities have become hard to find, and so the prospects for establishing professional arts practice seem more uncertain. Assessing the current state of the sector and establishing the needs of arts practitioners has therefore become vitally important.

The *It Takes a Region to Raise an Artist* research offers the first in-depth survey of the visual arts in the East Midlands. Its purpose is to **take stock** of the region's visual arts sector, identifying its key institutions, as well as its strengths and constraints, and to discover what members of the community might **need in order to fulfil their professional and artistic potential**.

The research was conducted through mapping existing provision and support, an online workforce survey, and conducting 15 one-to-one interviews. This new evidence will inform the wider development of *It Takes a Region to Raise an Artist*, CVAN EM's future programme to further develop the East Midlands as a region where artists and visual arts practitioners can flourish – artistically and economically.

466 individual artists and visual arts practitioners participated in an online survey with **399** meeting the inclusion criteria of: a) professional (not self-defining as an amateur); b) living/working within the East Midlands; and c) self-identifying as a member of the visual arts community.

This research was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council through a 10-month Creative Economy Engagement Fellowship awarded by the Midlands4Cities Doctoral Training Partnership (M4C) in 2019. The research was undertaken by the CAMEo Research Institute for Cultural and Media Economies at the University of Leicester, in partnership with CVAN EM.

PROJECT TEAM:

Dr Antoinette Burchill

(Creative Economy Research Fellow, lead researcher, CAMEo)

Professor Mark Banks

(Director, CAMEo)

Christina Williams

(Research Assistant, CAMEo)

Dr Stefano De Sabbata

(Lecturer in Quantitative Geography, University of Leicester)

Elizabeth Hawley-Lingham

(Director, CVAN EM)

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Address leaks in the 'talent pipeline'

A high number of practitioners aged between 35-54 completed the survey. This age group appeared to be relatively well networked, skilled and resourceful in finding the support and resources they need.

A very low number of practitioners aged 18-34 participated in the survey. Their responses revealed that they were less well networked in the community and felt less supported by the sector. A key issue for the East Midlands is finding ways of retaining its visual arts graduates and supporting them into work and career opportunities.

Recommendations:

- conduct further research into and with the 18-34 age group: who are they, where are they; what is their HEI experience, and what do they need to realise their ambitions?
- design new projects and opportunities to develop career pathways specifically for 18-34s;
- consider practitioners beyond this age group who graduated as mature students and who are now newly emerging artists.

Address the gender pay gap within the visual arts sector

Our data shows that:

- 66% women earn less than £10k
- 56% men earn less than £10k

While income differentials were relatively small (and incomes as a whole quite low) there was a preponderance of women earning the very lowest incomes, reflecting patterns more generally established across the arts and other creative sectors.

Recommendations:

- CVAN EM to raise awareness of low pay and the gender pay gap with strategic partners within the East Midlands region. Including: Arts Council England, visual arts NPOs, HEIs, Local Authorities, and national schemes like AA2A (Artists Access to Art Colleges) that have a significant presence in the region;
- CVAN EM to consider how to support women returning to their art practices after maternity leave, and practitioners with significant caring responsibilities (which tend most often to be women). This may be realised through specific projects, or as elements of larger projects;
- CVAN EM and CAMEo to consider developing further research on gender and pay to clarify these initial findings.

Address the region's relationship to arts funding

There is need to consider what appropriate models exist for financing an economically sustainable visual arts sector, and whether alternatives that mediate between different 'entrepreneurial', 'paternalistic' or 'collaborative' models might flourish. There is also need to consider how the responsibility for sustainable sector development rests with the entire visual arts community, and not just CVAN EM.

Recommendations:

- CVAN EM to investigate what relevant, useful or new funding models might support the East Midlands and its practitioners;
- CVAN EM to explore whether the spirit of *It Takes A Region To Raise An Artist* can translate into shared and supportive models of project development and fundraising. For

example, collaborative bidding, reciprocal support and exchange; cross-regional activity, intergenerational projects and/or commissions.

Address the lack of a coherent visual arts communication ‘voice’

The challenge of communicating a regional visual arts narrative has three parts:

1. How to speak to the sector.
2. How to speak with the sector.
3. How to speak about the sector.

There is scope to further develop a cohesive visual arts network through which to share and disseminate information, build connections and promote the sector. CVAN EM communicates with the sector via a monthly newsletter, but as yet only a minority of practitioners have signed up to receive this. CVAN EM is doing vital work but has its own resource limitations. By working with others in partnership, and by brokering connections with key regional players, it can help effect the creation of a cross-regional narrative and ‘voice’ for the sector.

Recommendations:

- CVAN EM to continue to build its communications strategy and network;
- CVAN EM to continue to market its benefits to the sector, encouraging practitioners to sign up to receive the newsletter to hear directly about forthcoming events, projects and opportunities;
- CVAN EM to investigate how, with the visual arts community, a regional arts narrative can be developed.

Address the inequalities of visual arts provision in the East Midlands

The project team created activity and density maps from the geotagged data locating arts and cultural venues across the East Midlands. The maps (available at <https://bit.ly/2kRDkqb>) enable a visual reading of the East Midlands visual arts sector. They highlight areas with high levels of visual arts provision (Nottingham, Leicester), areas with some provision (Derbyshire), and areas with very little provision (Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire).

Recommendations:

- Develop other forms of mapping and data visualisation to support further analysis of the distribution of arts activity across the region;
- CVAN EM to use activity and density maps to inform future networking and engagement.

KEY FINDINGS

The research offers detailed evidence on:

- the demographics of the visual arts sector (including: location, age, gender, ethnicity, education, earnings, employment);
- which artforms practitioners work in, which professional activities they deliver, at which levels they practice (i.e. regional, national, international);
- their ambitions for the next 5 years;
- the gaps and barriers that inhibit their professional and artistic potential; and
- the practical support needed to achieve their ambitions.

The data substantiates some commonly held assumptions about the UK visual arts sector. The majority of practitioners were found to:

- earn less than £10,000 per annum from their practice (63%), or less than £15,000 (80%);
- mainly work as sole practitioners or freelancers;
- have either one other, or multiple other jobs; work part-time on their practice;
- have received a formal arts education (48% to postgraduate level);
- come from white ethnic backgrounds.

Most practitioners expressed ambitions that tended to be quite specific and realistic in scope. The vast majority simply wanted opportunities to further extend and develop their practice, such as through making new, bigger or more experimental works.

Practitioners wished for their practice to become financially sustainable, and to obtain further opportunities to exhibit, undertake commissions, events or residencies. Many practitioners also struggled with isolation and lone working, and many did not feel as actively connected to the wider visual arts community as they would have liked.

Practitioners in the East Midlands need:

- more stable and sustainable incomes;
- funding opportunities and support in developing funding bids;
- paid work and opportunities;
- time (to develop new work);
- advice and business development support, including mentoring;
- more opportunities to meet and connect with other visual arts practitioners.

The full report *It Takes A Region To Raise An Artist: Understanding the East Midlands' Visual Arts Economy* is available from www.le.ac.uk/cameo and <http://cvaneastmidlands.co.uk/it-takes-a-region-to-raise-an-artist/>

University of Leicester
CAMEo Research Institute
7 Salisbury Road
Leicester, LE1 7QR, UK

t: +44 (0)116 252 5633
e: cameo@le.ac.uk
w: www.le.ac.uk/cameo

 @CAMEo_UoL

 @CVAN_EM

ABOUT CAMEo

CAMEo, the Research Institute for Cultural and Media Economies at the University of Leicester, was launched in 2016 to provide new understandings of the cultural industries, the 'creative economy', the arts and media, cultural policy, consumer culture dynamics, and the mediation and representation of cultural and economic life.

CAMEo is an interdisciplinary platform for academic research as well as for collaborations with culture and media practitioners. Together with a wide range of partners we explore the diverse and complex ways in which cultural and media economies are being defined, valued, enacted, experienced and represented.

We invite everyone interested in the cultural and media economies to join our conversations. Visit our website at www.le.ac.uk/cameo or get in touch via cameo@le.ac.uk

About CVAN EM

CVAN EM is the Contemporary Visual Arts Network for the East Midlands. Our mission is to strengthen and develop the contemporary visual arts sector in the region, working to safeguard the future of artists and our sector as a whole. We are a catalyst for new ways of supporting arts practice, regional connectivity and audience engagement. We contribute to a flourishing visual arts habitat, from making to presenting, where artists, organisations and audiences prosper.

Visit cvaneastmidlands.co.uk

Contact info@cvaneastmidlands.co.uk

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