

# Creative Livelihoods

A Pilot Study on the Long-term Development of Career Paths of Graduates from Creative Undergraduate Degree Programmes in Hong Kong with Particular Investigation on Signs for Potential Systematic Discrimination in the Careers of Female Creatives

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Since the early 2000s, the creative and cultural sectors in Hong Kong have found themselves at the centre of attention of socio-political and economic discussion, in both the public and academic spheres; they have become a major issue in governmental policy-making, and the bearers of much hope and many expectations. Nonetheless, little is known about the stakeholders at the core of this discourse, the individual creatives. What are the living conditions of visual artists working and living in Hong Kong? How do they go about their work, how do they earn money, how do they live their lives? In short: How do they 'survive'?

To this point, there was no comprehensive, systematic data available on the economic livelihood of the creative population in Hong Kong. For example, the traditional employment surveys conducted, e.g. by universities, don't necessarily apply to the alternative modes of making a living prevalent in the visual arts. Similarly, other common key indicators inadequately reflect the professional reality of the creative and cultural sectors.

This lack of comprehensive statistics is not merely a problem for policy-making and educational development in an area of significant market potential but may also obscure more problematic socio-political developments. For example, arts programmes traditionally have a very high ratio of female students, yet the number of practicing female creatives in Hong Kong appears particularly low. This may be a sign of structural/systemic gender discrimination, yet no factual data to prove or disprove such notions was available.

## Creative Livelihood Project

To address this issue, it was the intention of the Creative Livelihoods Project – funded by the HK Research Grants Council – to produce a comprehensive survey of graduates from creative undergraduate programmes that could most likely be expected to be seeking careers as visual artists. The primary focus of the survey was to focus on the economic situation of those graduates.

However, it's also the intention of this project to potentially identify touchpoints for improvement of the economic situation of visual artists in Hong Kong. Some visual artists self-evidently will be doing economically better than others; it would therefore be of interest to identify any shared traits in the career paths, educational history, and/or personal backgrounds of those higher earning practitioners, to see whether those might provide leverage for policy makers, education providers, and/or funding bodies to generally improve future careers in the visual arts.

Accordingly, the resulting survey questionnaire contained in total 86 questions, some with additional (conditional) sub-questions, distinguished into ten thematic sections:

1. Demographic information (3 questions);
2. Background and early academic achievements (11 questions);
3. Tertiary education (12 questions);
4. Career path and income (11 questions);
5. Current engagement with visual arts practice (4 questions);
6. Professional practice issues (5 questions);

- 7. Income details (14 questions);
- 8. Funding opportunities other than salary (3 questions);
- 9. Working time allocation (9 questions);
- 10.1 Continued professional development after graduation (5 questions; only for practicing visual artists);
- 10.2 Reasons for exiting the visual arts (9 questions; only for respondents not practicing in the visual arts anymore).

As the survey was to include visual artists in different career stages – ranging from fresh graduates to practitioners with advanced standing – it was decided to initially define three principal career stages after graduation:

- “early career” for the first five years after achieving the undergraduate degree (2011–2015);
- “advancing career” for years six to ten of professional activity (2006–2010); and
- “established career” for all participants graduated for more than ten years (2001–2005).

To allow for some coherence between the last group and the others, it was limited also to a period of five years, thus in total allowing the survey to cover 15 years, i.e. the graduating cohorts from 2001 to 2015.

After various considerations with stakeholders – academics, administrators, artists, and designers – it was finally decided to focus the survey on the graduates of five undergraduate programmes from four publicly funded institutions in Hong Kong:

- BA (Hons) in Fine Arts by Chinese University Hong Kong (CUHK);
- BA (Hons) in Design-scheme by the Polytechnic University of Hong Kong (PolyU);
- BA (Hons) in Creative Media by City University of Hong Kong (CityU)<sup>1</sup>;
- BA (Hons) in Visual Arts by Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU)<sup>2</sup>; and
- BA (Hons) in Digital Graphic Communication by Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU).

Additionally, the BA in Fine Arts offered by Hong Kong Arts School (HKAS) was included as a representative of the rather large group of privately funded institutions that have been offering creative programmes in Hong Kong. Its graduates are intended as a “control group” to compare basic student demographics and other findings of more general nature with those of the public universities, and thus to indicate whether the findings from the university programmes may be generalised also for the wider creative population.

## Methodology

The survey was conducted in three distinct phases:

- Phase I was dedicated to identifying and confirming the contact data of the target population, mostly through sourcing and harvesting information from graduation catalogues and websites;
- a quantitative online survey aimed at the entire identified population was at the heart of Phase II, conducted between April and June 2016;

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<sup>1</sup> The BA (Hons) in Creative Media by CityU started operations in 1998, thus had its first graduates only in 2002.

<sup>2</sup> The BA (Hons) in Visual Arts by HKBU started operations in 2005, thus had its first graduates only in 2008.

- the data collected from the survey established a comprehensive backdrop for further qualitative interviews in Phase III with 25 visual arts graduates providing in-depth looks at specific issues as identified through Phases I and II.

The reference date for the survey was defined – and communicated to its participants – as 31 March 2016. I.e. all answers provided e.g. about employment status, marital status, country of residence, and other similar potentially changing information represents the individual creative graduate's situation on this particular day.

## Survey Response and Significance

Between 2001 and 2015 a total of 4,953 students graduated from the six creative undergraduate programmes under study in this survey. Through the efforts of the project team valid contact information for 3,432 of these graduates could be collected from public sources, i.e. from the start about 31% of the total survey population were out of direct reach. In particular, despite all best efforts the project team could not establish large proportions of the graduation cohorts of PolyU's School of Design from the early years 2001 to 2007.

In total, 585 eligible graduates from the programmes under study completed the full survey, resulting in a response rate of 11.8%. Additionally, approx. 1,100 submitted partial questionnaires. While these responses may not be considered systematically, in some instances they may provide some insights nonetheless.

Proportionally, the survey received the lowest feedback from graduates of PolyU School of Design with only 4% of the eligible population responding. Accordingly, any data on the BDes scheme in this report must be interpreted with great caution as the sample size needs to generally be considered too small. Therefore, if any results from the BDes are listed, they are highlighted in light grey colour and usually are considered for information/comparison only.

Methodologically, the inclusion of the BA in Fine Arts programme of HKAS in the survey was intended as a control group for comparative purposes only, as in many ways – most notably for its funding – it's distinct from the other programmes surveyed. Therefore, also the results of HKAS – if shown – are highlighted in light grey colour and will equally be considered for information/comparison only. With a response rate of 9.8% for that constituency, the numbers for HKAS should however be more representative than those of PolyU.

Thus, if the responses for BDes (PolyU) and BAFA (HKAS) are taken out of the formal statistical considerations of the survey results, a total of 454 valid responses were received, representing a response rate of 17.8% of the eligible remaining population. This should allow for a statistical significance of  $\pm 5\%$  across the total population. However, as more responses were received from early career practitioners than from their more experienced counterparts, deductions especially on established career creatives generally have to be considered with more care.

### Survey responses by programmes

<i>Programme</i>	<i>Early Career</i>	<i>Advanced Career</i>	<i>Established Career</i>	<i>Total Responses</i>	<i>Eligible Population</i>	<i>Response Rate (in %)</i>
BAFA (CUHK)	35	22	13	70	377	18.6
BACM (CityU)	66	23	11	100	1,185	8.4
BAVA (HKBU)	163	60	–	223	643	34.7
BScDGC (HKBU)	31	18	12	61	343	17.8
BDes (PolyU)	39	27	7	73	1,813	4.0
BAFA (HKAS)	28	20	10	58	592	9.8
All (incl. PolyU/HKAS)	362	170	53	585	4,953	11.8
All (excl. PolyU/HKAS)	295	123	36	454	2,548	17.8

## I. Hong Kong's Visual Artists Population

### Summary:

- Between 2001 and 2015, 4,953 students graduated from one of the six undergraduate degree programmes under study in this project. Graduation output from these creative undergraduate programmes grew by almost 260% in that period.

- More than 91% of graduates from Hong Kong's creative undergraduate programmes remain in the city after graduation and contribute to the local creative ecology.

- In 2015, the creative and cultural industries employ approx. 5.7% of the total workforce of Hong Kong contributing about 5% to the local Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Creatives that graduated from local creative undergraduate programmes between 2001 and 2015 were mostly born in Hong Kong; only approx. 16% provide other countries as their place of birth, the very most of those state China (13%). Hong Kong's creative graduates subsequently prove to be extremely attached to their home town: 91% of them continue to live and work in the territory also after their graduation from university (PolyU: 83.6%; HKAS: 96.6%). However, many graduates that did move away were originally from abroad (=international students in respective programmes) and merely returned to their homes after completion of their studies; thus, it's fair to assume that probably less than 5% of local creative graduates moved to seek opportunities elsewhere<sup>3</sup>. For those that have left for foreign shores, most popular destinations were China (1.5%), USA (1.5%), UK (1.3%), and Germany (0.9%). Notably however, economic considerations don't necessarily seem to be the main reason for leaving Hong Kong, as – upon comparison of income levels of those who left and those who stayed – no significant difference between the income for creatives living in Hong Kong or other countries could be established<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> There is a methodological uncertainty in this assumption, as it could be that those who moved away were indeed merely out of the reach of the survey. However, the project team couldn't find any indication – evidential or anecdotal — of this being the case.

<sup>4</sup> This conclusion needs to be handled with care as the sample of graduates living abroad is comparatively small.

In Hong Kong itself, more than half of the creatives live in the New Territories with the single largest population in Shatin, followed by Eastern District (on Hong Kong Island), Yuen Long, Kwun Tong and Wong Tai Sin (both in Kowloon).

35% of the creative graduates surveyed live in long-term relationships, i.e. are married or committed in other forms of partnership (PolyU: 40%; HKAS: 62%). A recent statistic of Hong Kong's Census and Statistics Department suggests that in 2015 23.6% of the general population got married before the age of 35 (down from 27.3% in 2001)<sup>5</sup>. As this age range should roughly cover most of the survey's creative population, this would suggest that visual artists are distinctly more likely to live in long-term relationships than the general population.

Despite apparently being committed to their partnerships, only 6% of those surveyed have at least one child in their care (PolyU: 10%; HKAS: 12%). Interestingly – even surprisingly – child care is more common within the surveyed male population than within the female (Tab. I.1).

**Tab. I.1 Birth rates amongst Hong Kong's creative graduates (n=585)**

<i>Gender</i>	<i>With Children</i>	<i>Without Children</i>	<i>Overall</i>
Male	15 (9.7%)	140 (90.3%)	155
Female	25 (5.8%)	405 (94.2%)	430
Total	40 (6.8%)	545 (93.2%)	585

In terms of student numbers, the largest creative undergraduate programmes offered in Hong Kong before 2002 by a large margin was the BA in Design-scheme operated by the Polytechnic University's School of Design. Their approx. 100 graduates per year were matched only by approx. 20 graduates each from the BA (Hons) in Fine Arts from Chinese University Hong Kong and the BSc (Hons) in Digital Graphic Communication by Hong Kong Baptist University. The overall profile of the consolidated creative graduates in those early years was thus rather narrowly cut, leaning heavily towards Design. With the advent of two new programmes in the early/mid 2000s – the BA (Hons) in Creative Media, and the BA (Hons) in Visual Arts – this tendency was eventually evened out: SCM's focus on technology-based visual arts, and AVA's fine arts and applied crafts approach lead not only to a significantly higher total graduation number, but consolidated a broader, richer, more complex and balanced creative education ecology (Tab. I.2).

<sup>5</sup> Census and Statistics Department, 'Percentage of HK's General Population Married before the Age of 35' (Hong Kong: Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, 28 July 2016).

**Tab. I.2 Creative graduates from 2001 to 2015**

<i>Graduation Year</i>	<i>BAFA (CUHK)</i>	<i>BACM (CityU)</i>	<i>BAVA (HKBU)</i>	<i>BScDGC (HKBU)</i>	<i>BDes (PolyU)</i>	<i>Creative Graduates</i>	<i>All Graduates</i>
2001	17	–	–	23	94	134	13,376
2002	19	60	–	25	101	205	13,589
2003	23	66	–	18	105	212	13,531
2004	21	69	–	19	100	209	13,945
2005	30	70	–	25	107	232	14,070
2006	34	64	–	20	106	224	14,782
2007	20	67	–	24	137	248	14,955
2008	25	88	60	25	139	337	15,453
2009	23	85	62	24	132	326	16,148
2010	22	86	65	23	115	311	16,724
2011	17	110	79	22	128	356	17,143
2012	29	103	85	24	129	370	17,136
2013	26	100	77	22	135	360	17,439
2014	40	105	107	24	136	412	17,996
2015	31	112	108	25	149	425	19,107
<b>Growth in %</b>	<b>82.4</b>	<b>86.7</b>	<b>80.0</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>58.5</b>	<b>217.2</b>	<b>42.9</b>

With all these efforts, the output of the sampled publicly funded creative undergraduate programmes increased by approx. 217% between 2001 and 2015, compared to approx. 43% growth in general university graduation in the same period. Nonetheless, creative graduates from the sampled programmes still merely represent 2% of the total graduation population of 2015 (compared to 1% in 2001), i.e. proportionally creative undergraduate programmes contribute an almost negligibly fraction to Hong Kong's academic landscape.

The total graduates' number from the sampled programmes in the sampling period – from 2001 to 2015 a of total 4,361 – represent merely 0.02% of the total work force in the cultural and creative industries (see Tab. I.3) – if indeed all graduates from these programmes continued a creative career. The cultural and creative industries as defined by the Hong Kong government are catered for by a much broader range of educational programmes (e.g. film, IT, architecture) and institutions than sampled in this survey; nonetheless, it would appear that creatives with a relevant local tertiary education represent only a very small fraction of the total work force in the cultural and creative industries.

**Tab. I.3 Number of persons employed in the creative and cultural industries<sup>6</sup>**

Sector	2001 <sup>7</sup>	2005 <sup>8</sup>	2006 <sup>9</sup>	2010	2011	2014
<b>Creative and Cultural Industries</b>	<b>170,011</b>	<b>171,990</b>	<b>177,200</b>	<b>189,430</b>	<b>192,930</b>	<b>213,060</b>
% share of total employment	5,1%	5,1%	5,2%	5,4%	5,4%	5,7%

## II. Gender

### Summary:

- 72% of graduates from publicly funded creative undergraduate programmes in Hong Kong between 2001 and 2015 were female; the female proportion continuously grew in the same period.

- This gender ratio does not carry on through the following career stages, i.e. female visual artists drop out of their chosen career at significantly higher rate than their male counterparts.

- Reviews of various professional visual arts events in Hong Kong suggest that women are continuously and apparently increasingly under-represented at these occasions.

From 2001 to 2015, an average of 72.2% of graduates from publicly funded creative undergraduate programmes in Hong Kong were female (see Tab. II.1; 70.9% if including those from HKAS), compared to an average of approx. 53% of women graduating throughout the publicly funded tertiary sector<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Census and Statistics Department, 'Hong Kong Monthly Digest of Statistics: The Cultural and Creative Industries in Hong Kong', Hong Kong Monthly Digest of Statistics (Hong Kong: Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, June 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Data for 2001 must be considered with care. As the creative industries had not yet been classified as such at that time, the various sectors don't always correspond with those as adopted post 2003. The data provided is thus merely indicative and doesn't necessarily add up to the total.

<sup>8</sup> To facilitate analysis of the development trend over a longer time frame, crude estimates of value added for these component domains for 2005 and 2006 were compiled from other sources, including the then Annual Survey of Personal, Social and Recreational Services. Caution should thus be taken in interpreting the figures for 2005 and 2006, which may not be strictly comparable to figures for 2010 and onwards.

<sup>9</sup> To facilitate analysis of the development trend over a longer time frame, crude estimates of value added for these component domains for 2005 and 2006 were compiled from other sources, including the then Annual Survey of Personal, Social and Recreational Services. Caution should thus be taken in interpreting the figures for 2005 and 2006, which may not be strictly comparable to figures for 2010 and onwards.

<sup>10</sup> Based on graduation data from UGC's online Customised Data Retrieval website for the academic years 2009/10 to 2014/15.



**Tab. II.1 Gender proportions by graduation year and programme from 2001 to 2015**

<i>Programme</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2012</i>	<i>2013</i>	<i>2014</i>	<i>2015</i>	<i>Overall</i>
<b>BAFA (CUHK)</b>																
Male (%)	41.2	31.6	34.8	14.3	16.7	23.5	25.0	32.0	34.8	13.6	17.6	20.7	30.7	15.0	19.4	23.9
Female (%)	58.8	68.4	65.2	85.7	83.3	76.5	75.0	68.0	65.2	86.4	82.4	79.3	69.2	85.0	80.6	76.1
<b>BACM (CityU)</b>																
Male (%)	–	28.3	30.3	42.0	32.9	32.8	37.3	42.0	25.9	32.6	26.4	31.1	31.0	40	24.1	32.4
Female (%)	–	71.7	69.7	58.0	67.1	67.2	62.7	58.0	74.1	67.4	73.6	68.9	69.0	60	75.9	67.6
<b>BAVA (HKBU)</b>																
Male (%)	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	10	24.2	29.2	26.6	22.4	16.9	15.9	19.4	20.4
Female (%)	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	90	75.8	70.8	73.4	77.6	83.1	84.1	80.6	79.6
<b>BScDGC (HKBU)</b>																
Male (%)	17.4	20.0	44.4	10.5	16.0	25.0	41.7	24.0	33.3	26.1	13.6	25.0	13.6	33.3	24.0	24.8
Female (%)	82.6	80.0	55.6	89.5	84.0	75.0	58.3	76.0	66.7	73.9	86.4	75.0	86.4	66.7	76.0	75.2
<b>BDes (PolyU)<sup>11</sup></b>																
Male (%)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	41.0	36.4	38.3	29.7	29.5	40.7	36.0	36.2	37.5
Female (%)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	59.0	63.6	61.7	70.3	70.5	59.3	64.0	63.8	62.5
<b>BAFA (HKAS)<sup>12</sup></b>																
Male (%)	34.6	29.2	33.3	16.3	13.3	27.3	34.4	27.9	36.6	24.3	44.4	31.6	36.0	40.5	27.0	30.1
Female (%)	65.4	70.8	66.7	83.7	86.7	72.7	65.6	72.1	63.4	75.7	55.6	68.4	64.0	59.5	73.0	69.9
Male (%)	30.3	27.6	33.6	27.0	22.4	28.4	36.4	33.2	31.6	31.3	28.1	27.9	31.2	30.6	26.8	29.1
Female	69.7	72.4	66.4	73.0	77.6	71.6	63.6	66.8	68.4	68.7	71.9	72.1	68.8	69.4	73.2	70.9

<sup>11</sup> The School of Design of Polytechnic University could only confirm the gender distribution within the BA in Design-scheme for the cohorts 2008 to 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Hong Kong Art School could not confirm any graduation information for their BA in Fine Arts programme. The figures shown are based on the project team's own investigation, thus represent merely a well-informed approximation to the actual numbers. We believe to have achieved an accuracy of at least 95% throughout all years.

While no clear trend in gender distribution articulates at initial sight, a look at its development in five-years batches (Tab. II.2) reveals that the ratio of female graduates has increased significantly over years – especially in those programmes leaning towards the fine arts – with the notable exception of the BA in Fine Arts offered by Hong Kong Art School, the only privately funded programme under study. Apparently, the increased availability of study places in publicly funded programmes, pushed the male student population out into the private sector.

**Tab. II.2 Gender ratios by career stages and programmes from 2001 to 2015**

<i>Programme</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Early Career</i>	<i>Advanced Career</i>	<i>Established Career</i>	<i>Overall</i>
BAFA (CUHK)	Male (%)	20.7	25.8	27.7	23.9
	Female (%)	79.3	74.2	72.3	76.1
BACM (CityU)	Male (%)	30.5	34.1	33.4	32.4
	Female (%)	69.5	65.9	66.6	67.6
BAVA (HKBU)	Male (%)	20.2	21.1	–	20.4
	Female (%)	79.8	78.9	–	79.6
BScDGC (HKBU)	Male (%)	21.9	30.0	21.7	24.8
	Female (%)	78.1	70.0	78.3	75.2
BDes (PolyU) <sup>13</sup>	Male (%)	34.4	38.6	n.a.	37.5
	Female (%)	65.6	61.4	n.a.	62.5
BAFA (HKAS) <sup>14</sup>	Male (%)	35.9	30.1	25.3	30.1
	Female (%)	64.1	69.9	74.7	69.9
	Male (%)	27.9	28.1	27.9	29.1
	Female (%)	72.1	71.9	72.1	70.9

Within this over-arching observation, PolyU's BA in Design has the lowest ratio of female graduates at 62.5% over time, while HKBU's BA (Hons) in Visual Arts on average has the largest female alumni ratio at 79.8%. In the most recent quintennium however, CUHK's BA (Hons) in Fine Arts pretty much levelled with the latter in terms of female/male graduate distribution, thus possibly indicating the upper end in the gender distribution at an average of approx. 80% female students.

Given the gradual approximation of gender distributions at HKBU and CUHK, it is tempting to speculate that possibly the fine arts-oriented programmes attract more female students, while the more applied, design-oriented programmes are more for men. However, HKBU's DGC-programme, which was distinctly setup up as a programme for the design industries, had almost just as many female graduates as the fine arts programmes. Similarly, a distinction by less/more technology-based approaches might be considered to

<sup>13</sup> The School of Design of Polytechnic University could only confirm the gender distribution within the BA in Design-scheme for the cohorts 2008 to 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Hong Kong Art School could not confirm any graduation information for their BA in Fine Arts programme. The figures shown are based on the project team's own investigation, thus represent merely a well-informed approximation of the actual numbers. We believe to have achieved an accuracy of at least 95% throughout all years.

explain the gender distribution, but again especially HKBU’s DGC-programme and to a lesser extent CityU’s BACM, which are both heavy on digital technology, suggest that these may not be sufficient explanations.

Another reason for male/female distribution amongst studied programmes might be deducted from the rising number of male students at HKAS: privately funded undergraduate programmes are often considered by students who weren’t admissible for publicly funded degree programmes, often because they didn’t meet the required academic benchmarks. Re-examining the admission scores of surveyed programmes with this background as a cue, it appears that in tendency those undergraduate programmes with higher intake scores have more female students (Tab. II.3). This initial hypothesis is backed up by evidence of correlations between intake scores and ratio of female students<sup>15</sup>.

It proved to be impossible to attain data related to admission processes of surveyed programmes in the years relevant to this project. However, for the intake years 2012 to 2015 the Academy of Visual Arts received on average 2.7 times as many applications from female students as from male (i.e. only one out of four applications is from a male contender); yet, in the same years, AVA admit 4.3 times more women than man into their BA (Hons) in Visual Arts programme. As AVA’s admission exercise – like most tertiary creative programmes – considers a mix of academic and creative achievements for admission, this would imply that female applicants at this point clearly outdo their male competitors. This of course at best can only be an indicative example as no more information about previous intakes at AVA and other schools could be found. Nonetheless, all these observations would imply that programmes, which are more competitive to get in to – because of their higher admission scores – end up with a larger female population, as young women in Hong Kong on average achieve better in secondary school.

**Tab. II.3 Intake CDC-scores by programmes from 2001 to 2012<sup>16</sup>**

<i>Programme</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2012</i>
BAFA (CUHK)							16.0	16.8	17.3	18.4	18.3	19.3
BACM (CityU)			13,0	12,0	13.9	14.3	13.3	14.9	15.7	15.5	15.7	17.0
BAVA (HKBU)					12.5	15.1	14.6	14.0	13.3	13.1	13.9	15.1
BScDGC (HKBU)	15.2	14.4	15.4	16.3	15.2	15.0	15.2	14.9	13.6	12.8	16.3	16.8
BDes (PolyU)							14.7	12.6	13.7	14	12.4	12.1

It is notable that the very high proportion of female undergraduate visual artists does not follow through in other consecutive data that would commonly establish the further career paths of creative graduates. E.g. at master-level male/female distribution over the period 2008 to 2015<sup>17</sup> balances at 40:60%, i.e. proportionally significantly more male graduates seek further education in the field than their female counterparts.

<sup>15</sup> The correlation is particularly evident between the programmes of CUHK, CityU, PolyU and HKAS. Both HKBU programmes to some extent defy this trend, possibly because they consider other admission criteria (portfolio, interview) higher than their sister programmes who admit based on CDC-scores only.

<sup>16</sup> Admission scores to degree programmes are generally not published by institutions, though are made available through UGC’s website, though unfortunately only eight years back (i.e. at the time of the investigation to 2007). Some additional data for BAVA and BScDGC was supplied by the HKBU Registry.

<sup>17</sup> As all creative master programmes offered by institutions in Hong Kong are self-funded, thus graduation data on them is handled much more restrictively. The proportions cited are based on the graduation data of CUHK’s MA in Fine Arts (2011 to 2015) and MFA (2008 to 2015), HKBU’s MVA (2011 to 2015), and PolyU’s MDes (2008 to 2015) only.

Other indicators of successful careers in the visual arts – e.g. awards, exhibition records – suggest an even bleaker picture for practicing female artists in Hong Kong. E.g. since 2001 Hong Kong contributed nine exhibitions to the Venice Art Biennale, including in total 14 individual artists<sup>18</sup> of which only three were female<sup>19</sup> (21%). Hong Kong’s last five Venice Biennale contributions were solo shows by individual male artists; so far, no female artist got that privilege (see Tab. II.4).

**Tab. II.4 Hong Kong’s representatives at the Venice Art Biennale from 2001 to 2017**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Artist</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Alma Mater, Graduation Year</i>
2017	Young Kar-Fai, Samson	M	University of Sydney, 2002
2015	Tsang Kin-Wah	M	CUHK, 2000
2013	Lee Kit	M	CUHK, 2003
2011	Kwok Mang-Ho	M	Grantham College of Education, 1970
2009	Pak Sheung-Chuen	M	CUHK, 2002
2007	Cheung Wan-Man, Amy	F	Goldsmith, 1996
	Hiram To	M	n.a.
	Map Office (incl. Laurent Gutierrez and Valérie Portefaix)	M/F	n.a.
2005	Stanley Wong	M	HK Technical Teachers College, 1980
	Chan Yuk-Keung	M	CUHK, 1983
2003	Para/site Collective	n.a.	n.a.
2001	Ho Siu-Kee	M	CUHK, 1989
	Leung Chi-Wo	M	CUHK, 1990
	Ellen Pau	F	n.a.

Between 2003 and 2016, the Hong Kong Arts Development Council conferred the Artist of the Year Awards a total of eleven times (Tab. II.5). In the categories relevant to this study – Visual Arts and Media Arts – only two out of thirteen Best Artist Awards were received by female artists (=15%); among the 20 Young Artist Awards in this period were seven women (=35%) though the proportion of female recipients of the Young Artist Award – who, one would assume, are selected from the pool of more recent visual arts graduates – shrank to none in the last three years<sup>20</sup>. It may also be noted that on average male young artists received their award 6.8 years after graduation from their respective undergraduate degrees, while their female counterparts needed to wait for 8.4 years.

**Tab. II.5 Winners of the Hong Kong Arts Development Council’s Artist of the Year Awards (2003 to 2017)**

<sup>18</sup> In 2003, the exhibition consisted of a show by the Para/site Collective; no individual artists were named. Artists of both genders were featured in the exhibition.

<sup>19</sup> One of these female artists – Valérie Portefaix – was invited as part of the artist team Map Office.

<sup>20</sup> Considering awards from 2014 to 2016.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Artist</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Award Category</i>
2016	Chung Wai-Ching, Bryan	M	Artist of the Year (Media Arts)
	Ching Chin-Fai, Luke	M	Artist of the Year (Visual Arts)
	Cheng Tak-Yan, Enoch	M	Young Artist (Media Arts)
	Lau Hok-Shing, Hanison	M	Young Artist (Visual Arts)
2015	Ho Siu-Kee	M	Artist of the Year (Visual Arts)
	Wong Ping	M	Young Artist (Media Arts)
	Chui Pui-Chee	M	Young Artist (Visual Arts)
2014	Cedric Maridet	M	Best Artist (Media Arts)
	Leung Mee-Ping, Momo	F	Best Artist (Visual Arts)
	Wong Chi-Chuen, Kenny	M	Young Artist (Media Arts)
	Nadim Abbas	M	Young Artist (Visual Arts)
2013	Ng Siu-King, Kingsley	M	Best Artist (Media Arts)
	Lam Tung-Pang	M	Best Artist (Visual Arts)
	Kwan Tsz-Wai, Alan	M	Young Artist (Media Arts)
	Au Hoi-Lam	F	Young Artist (Visual Arts)
2012	Young Kar-Fai, Samson	M	Best Artist (Media Arts)
	Pak Sheung-Chuen, Tozer	M	Best Artist (Visual Arts)
	Choi Sai-Ho	M	Young Artist (Media Arts)
	Ho Sin-Tung	F	Young Artist (Visual Arts)
2011	Stanley Wong	M	Best Artist (Visual Arts)
	Hui Fong-Wah, Phoebe	F	Young Artist (Media Arts)
	Kwan Sheung-Chi	M	Young Artist (Visual Arts)
2010	Lam Yuk-Lin	F	Best Artist (Visual Arts)
	Cheung Hon-Him	M	Young Artist (Media Arts)
	Tang Kwok-Hin	M	Young Artist (Visual Arts)
2009	Kacey Wong	M	Best Artist (Visual Arts)
	Chan Ka-Yuen	F	Young Artist (Visual Arts)
2008	Tong King-Sum	M	Best Artist (Visual Arts)
2007	Cheung Wan-Man, Amy	F	Outstanding Young Artist (Visual Arts)
2003	Cheung Wai-Yee	F	Rising Artist (Visual Arts)
	Kacey Wong	M	Rising Artist (Visual Arts)
	Koon Wai-Bong	M	Rising Artist (Visual Arts)
	So Yan-Kei	F	Rising Artist (Visual Arts)

These are merely two examples, yet they're indicative of similar trends to be observed also in other professional visual arts contexts in Hong Kong. E.g. an audit of records<sup>21</sup> of 677 solo exhibitions put on show

<sup>21</sup> The audit is based on available information on gallery websites and only includes exhibitions for individual artists, including those shown at art fairs. Art collectives are excluded for simplicity's sake.

by 24 major commercial galleries with permanent spaces in Hong Kong between 2008 and 2017, showed that only 148 of them (21.9%) were for women artists<sup>22</sup>. As these were of course not limited to only local visual artists and as many of the galleries surveyed have an international background, it may be assumed that under-representation of female artists is not exclusively a Hong Kong problem.

### III. Employment and Income

*Summary:*

*- Structurally, Hong Kong's creatives in their majority work within a comparatively stable labour market; across all career stages, more than half are full-time employed.*

*- A broad majority of graduates from creative undergraduate programmes in Hong Kong continue their careers within the creative and cultural sectors with Design and Education overall providing the most professional opportunities.*

*- Employed status (full-time/part-time) earns more than freelance status; non-creative employment earns more than employments in the creative field; for self-employed/free-lance income consistent across all sectors.*

*- Mean full-time equivalent income achieved by creative graduates compares positively with income levels of university graduates in general.*

*- Female creative graduates on average earn less though not to an extent that would allow to conclude on systematic discrimination.*

*- Work satisfaction amongst creative graduates in their current jobs overall rates comparatively high at an average of 2.78 out of 4.*

A key consideration of any professional pursuit is to what extent it may sustain the livelihood of those pursuing it, and obviously, this is no different in the creative and cultural sectors. Visual artists need to make a living as much as anybody else, and they also have plans for their lives like anybody else – family, retirement, pursuit of happiness – which need to be sustained. Accordingly, their income situation is of core concern to creative practitioners – as it would be to everybody else.

The economic livelihood of Hong Kong's visual artists was the core concern of this project, thus much of the survey's focus was about economic success. Thus, it should be emphasised and understood that consideration of creative success – i.e. artistic recognition, creative achievements, or even just employment in a creative job – wasn't an objective of this project, at least partly because those criteria are very difficult to establish and assess. While it may be assumed that creative achievements of higher quality will eventually raise a higher income and lead to greater economic success, this correlation isn't necessarily true and may easily be shown by many examples to be overly simplistic and false. Thus, income for the purpose of this study is used as indicative evidence of professional success, may however not be mistaken at any point for a statement on creative quality or artistic success.

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<sup>22</sup> Enid Tsui, 'How Women Artists Still Face Glass Ceiling at Hong Kong Galleries', South China Morning Post, 3 March 2018, <http://www.scmp.com/culture/arts-entertainment/article/2135372/why-do-hong-kong-art-galleries-show-so-few-women-artists>.

While long-term full-time employment may still be a common aspiration – especially amongst (Hong Kong’s) parents – in the international visual arts ecology it has been on the decline for a long while. Instead, various research<sup>23</sup> in other industrialised economies suggests that contract work is the prevalent working pattern in the creative and cultural industries resulting in higher proportions of self-employment, freelance work as well as (project-based) part-time employment than in other sectors. As single contracts may not produce a sustainable income, visual artists will often work on different projects simultaneously, combining income streams in a portfolio of professional engagements – creative and non-creative.

**Tab. III.1 Employment statuses of Hong Kong’s visual artists by career stages** (n=452; excl. PolyU/HKAS)

Status	Early Career	Advanced Career	Established Career	Overall
F/T Employed (fixed term)	92 (31.2%)	31 (25.2%)	8 (22.2%)	131 (29%)
F/T Employed (permanent)	65 (22%)	39 (31.7%)	13 (36.1%)	117 (25.9%)
P/T Employed	9 (3.1%)	4 (3.3%)	1 (2.8%)	14 (3.1%)
Self-Employed	7 (2.4%)	4 (3.3%)	5 (13.9%)	16 (3.5%)
Freelance	30 (10.2%)	10 (8.1%)	3 (8.3%)	43 (9.5%)
Unemployed	2 (0.7%)	1 (=0.8%)	1 (2.8%)	4 (0.9%)
Not looking for work	2 (0.7%)	0 (0%)	1 (2.8%)	3 (0.7%)
Voluntary/unpaid work	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Time out/career break	4 (1.4%)	2 (1.6%)	0 (0%)	6 (1.3%)
Maternity or other care	1 (0.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.2%)
Other	1 (0.3%)	4 (3.3%)	0 (0%)	5 (1.1%)
Portfolio of several of the above	82 (26.9%)	26 (20.9%)	4 (11.2%)	112 (24.7%)
	n= 295	121	36	452

<sup>23</sup> For example see Pierre-Michel Menger, *The Economics of Creativity: Art and Achievement under Uncertainty*, trans. Steven Rendall et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); or Linda Ball, Emma Pollard, and Nick Stanley, ‘Creative Graduates Creative Futures: A Major Longitudinal Study Undertaken between 2008 and 2010 of the Career Patterns of Graduates in Art, Design, Crafts and Media Subjects Qualifying in 2002, 2003 and 2004 from 26 UK Higher Education Institutions’ (Brighton: Creative Graduates Creative Futures Higher Education Partnership and the Institute for Employment Studies, 2010).

According to participants' survey responses a total of 54.7% of visual arts graduates in Hong Kong are full-time employed (Tab. III.1); interestingly, this proportion remains fairly stable throughout all career stages with merely a small rise from early careers (53.2%) to established careers (58.3%). Equally, part-time employment remains stable at around 3.1% throughout all career stages, which is particularly notable as e.g. in the UK 27% of visual artists work in part-time employment<sup>24</sup>. In difference to common notions of the "starving artist" also unemployment remains low at an average of 0.9% across the population. Compared to other international creative constituencies, all these figures indicate that Hong Kong's creative graduates still develop their careers along fairly traditional employment profiles.

This finding is also supported by the relative stability of employment relations of creative graduates (Tab. III.2). While early career visual artists in Hong Kong may in individual cases change jobs up to seven times in their first five years after graduation, on average they change employment only 1.32 times<sup>25</sup>. The mean for advanced career creatives is at 2.61 job changes twice as high, suggesting a continuous low-to-medium intensity flexibility of the labour market in the first ten years of visual artists' careers that then however slows down significantly in the established careers group.

The most varied developments in employment situation are to be found amongst the self-employed, freelance and portfolio workers (see Tab. III.1 again). In their early careers, 12.6% of creative graduates work self-employed or freelance, and 26.9% need to hold onto a portfolio of jobs to make ends meet. The latter figure however drops to 11.2% by the established career stage – i.e. less creatives need to work multiple contract in parallel; those former portfolio workers in their majority move towards self-employed/freelance occupations (total of 22.2%), possibly indicating that for this section of the creative population full-time employment may – for whichever reasons – not have been a worthwhile pursuit from the beginning.

**Tab. III.2 Number of changes in employment over individuals' career (n=579)**

<i>Career Stage</i>	<i>Mean Job Changes</i>	<i>Range of Job Changes</i>
Early career	1.32	0–7
Advanced career	2.61	0–12
Established career	3.02	0–10
Overall	1.85	0–12

To establish income levels of creative graduates from Hong Kong, survey participants were asked to indicate their annual total income for the tax year 2015/16<sup>26</sup> within a set of provided income ranges (Tab. III.3), irrespective of their employment statuses and/or areas of work.

<sup>24</sup> Linda Ball, Emma Pollard, and Nick Stanley, 'Creative Graduates Creative Futures: A Major Longitudinal Study Undertaken between 2008 and 2010 of the Career Patterns of Graduates in Art, Design, Crafts and Media Subjects Qualifying in 2002, 2003 and 2004 from 26 UK Higher Education Institutions' (Brighton: Creative Graduates Creative Futures Higher Education Partnership and the Institute for Employment Studies, 2010). p. 119.

<sup>25</sup> Self-employed or freelancers who continue working in these capacities are considered as "not changing employment", despite they may of course be working on ever changing projects/contracts.

<sup>26</sup> Hong Kong's tax year covered the period from 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016.



**Tab. III.3 Responses by ranges of annual income in tax year 2015/16 (n=454)**

<i>Ranges of Annual Income</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>PolyU</i>	<i>HKAS</i>
HKD9,999 or below	20 (4.4%)	7 (9.6%)	7 (12.1%)
HKD10,000–HKD24,999	30 (6.6%)	1 (1.4%)	7 (12.1%)
HKD25,000–HKD49,999	17 (3.7%)	3 (4.1%)	4 (6.9%)
HKD50,000–HKD74,999	32 (7%)	5 (6.8%)	3 (5.2%)
HKD75,000–HKD99,999	35 (7.7%)	9 (12.3%)	4 (6.9%)
HKD100,000–HKD149,999	81 (17.8%)	5 (6.8%)	8 (13.8%)
HKD150,000–HKD199,999	90 (19.8%)	8 (11%)	7 (12.1%)
HKD200,000–HKD299,999	82 (18.1%)	16 (21.9%)	7 (12.1%)
HKD300,000–HKD499,999	50 (11%)	16 (21.9%)	7 (12.1%)
HKD500,000 or above	17 (3.7%)	3 (4.1%)	4 (6.9%)
	n= 454	73	58

As may be expected – especially as the responding population is slightly heavy on the early career side – the bulk of responses are from the (lower) middle income range, yet with a majority of respondents (52.6%) placing themselves with an overall annual income of more than HKD150,000. By comparison, the income levels of PolyU graduates are slightly higher – though this may be a matter of statistical margins – and HKAS graduates apparently do less well, possibly because more of their graduates work part-time.

Using the mid-point of the ranges in Tab. III.3 as value, a mean full-time equivalent annual income can be approximated. As the intention is to estimate full-time equivalent incomes, responses by creatives in full-time employment only were taken into consideration (n=363). The figures in Tab. III.4a/b may be read as indicative income means only, despite the temptation to take these statistical approximations by their face-value.

**Tab. III.4a Mean income of Hong Kong's visual artists by programme<sup>27</sup>**

<sup>27</sup> For a valid mean approximation, the sample size should usually be  $n \geq 30$ . I.e. the mean income for BAFA (HKAS) has to be considered with great care as it's based on  $n=20$ .

<i>Programme</i>	<i>Mean Income (in HKD)</i>	<i>n</i>
BAFA (CUHK)	245,166	30
BACM (CityU)	213,105	66
BAVA (HKBU) <sup>28</sup>	186,585	145
BScDGC (HKBU)	266,849	50
BDes (PolyU) <sup>29</sup>	239,086	52
BAFA (HKAS)	259,874	20
Overall	218,863	363

**Tab. III.4b Mean income of Hong Kong's visual artists by career stages**

<i>Career Stage</i>	<i>Mean Income (in HKD)</i>	<i>n</i>
Early Career	166,300	221
Advanced Career	277,949	111
Established Career	382,015	31
Overall	218,863	363

Despite mean annual incomes throughout the entire population appear relatively reasonable at first glance, they are – as Tab. III.5 shows – experienced as precarious: across all career stages, 85% of respondents feel that they're only at the beginning of their career and/or can barely survive on their income. It's especially concerning that even half of those who have been in the business for more than ten years, should still feel that way. And it's indeed not just a feeling: incomes of those feeling that "they can barely survive" are on average 46% lower than those of "firmly established" respondents.

**Tab. III.5 Professional standing within work environment (n= 453; excl. PolyU/HKAS)**

<i>Professional Standing</i>	<i>Early Career</i>	<i>Advanced Career</i>	<i>Established Career</i>	<i>Overall</i>
I'm beginning/starting out in my career	182 (61.9%)	36 (29.3%)	4 (11.1%)	222 (49%)
I can survive, but sometimes it's still difficult	91 (31%)	58 (47.2%)	14 (38.9%)	163 (36%)
I'm firmly established	16	22	14	52

<sup>28</sup> As the only programme in this survey, the BAVA doesn't have any graduates at the established career stage, i.e. its income mean is based on early and advanced career participants only. The lower mean income thus is to be expected and should not be compared directly to other programmes. See Tab. III.7 for a more appropriate overview.

<sup>29</sup> To remind: all figures for PolyU's BDes are based on a comparatively small feedback of only 4% of the total graduate numbers. Responses were especially few for established career stage, which will result in an income skewed towards the lower side.

	(5.4%)	(17.9%)	(38.9%)	(11.5%)
I'm known beyond my area of work	0 (0%)	2 (1.6%)	2 (5.6%)	4 (0.9%)
I'm established but work less intensively than before	5 (1.7%)	5 (4.1%)	2 (5.6%)	12 (2.6%)
	n= 294	123	36	453

In 2015, Hong Kong's New Forum & New Youth Forum published a study comparing entry income levels and income growths patterns of university graduates born between 1964 and 1993<sup>30</sup> (Tab. III.6). Based on their findings, a university graduate leaving university between 2011 and 2015<sup>31</sup> could expect an average monthly entry salary of HKD10,860 (=HKD130,320 per year); the mean income reported by early career creatives at annually HKD166,300<sup>32</sup> would be approx. 24% higher. Not forgetting that the creative mean income is merely a statistical approximation, it should nonetheless be fair to assume that young creatives on average achieve at least similar – and usually better – incomes than the general population of recent graduates.

**Tab. III. 6 Mean monthly income of a Hong Kong university graduate** (inflation-adjusted; brackets show respective annual income)

Year	6 <sup>th</sup> Generation (in HKD)	5 <sup>th</sup> Generation (in HKD)	4 <sup>th</sup> Generation (in HKD)
2013	10,860 (130,320)	14,770 (177,240)	21,720 (260,640)
2008	–	11,759 (141,108)	15,337 (184,044)
2003	–	–	11,148 (133,776)

In terms of income growth, New Forum finds that the inflation adjusted salary of a graduate from the Generation 4 group<sup>33</sup> would have experienced a 37.6% salary increase over her first five working years and another 41.6% increase within the second five years period, resulting in a total increase of 94.8% in the first decade. This compares to respectively 67.1% and 37.4% average income growth in the first two quintennial working periods of creative graduates. Even after inflation adjustment, income development in the creative and cultural sectors in general exceeded the general income development trend.

<sup>30</sup> New Forum and New Youth Forum, 'Comparative Study on Salaries for University Graduates in Hong Kong' (Hong Kong: New Forum; New Youth Forum, 27 July 2015).

<sup>31</sup> Coincidentally, Generations 4, 5 and 6 in New Forum's terminology overlap perfectly with the Established, Advanced and Early Career stages differentiation used in this study. Members of Generation 4 were born between 1979 and 1983, of Generation 5 between 1984 and 1988, and of Generation 6 between 1989 and 1993.

<sup>32</sup> Considering the lower result achieved through Method 2.

<sup>33</sup> Generation 4 of New Forum's definition equals the Established Career group in this study.

Looking into the development of mean incomes by career stages and programmes (Tab. III.7) in more detail, it's notable that incomes differ quite substantially by programmes, and interestingly within programmes over time, though at least some of those developments would probably be artefacts of small sample sizes<sup>34</sup>.

Despite the common assumptions of Design by its subject nature being more applied and commercially exploitable than art, the more Design-oriented programmes don't do particularly better than the more art-oriented in terms of graduate incomes – not taking into account that the sample size from PolyU is quite small, thus its income approximations may not be entirely valid.

**Tab. III.7 Mean income of Hong Kong's visual artists by programme and career stages<sup>35</sup>**

<i>Programme</i>	<i>Early Career</i> <i>(in HKD)</i>	<i>Advanced Career</i> <i>(in HKD)</i>	<i>Established Career</i> <i>(in HKD)</i>	<i>Overall</i> <i>(in HKD)</i>
BAFA (CUHK)	207,352	278,749	319,999	245,166
BACM (CityU)	159,715	296,666	369,642	213,105
BAVA (HKBU) <sup>36</sup>	158,700	252,732	–	186,585
BScDGC (HKBU)	198,645	276,562	414,999	266,849
BDes (PolyU)	148,541	307,385	350,832 <sup>37</sup>	239,086
BAFA (HKAS)	167,999	302,499	466,666 <sup>38</sup>	259,874
Overall	166,300	277,949	382,015	218,863

Comparison between income-levels of programmes could possibly support the notion that technology-orientation – i.e. implied cutting-edge specialist knowledge – results in higher achievable incomes. BACM by CityU and BScDGC of HKBU<sup>39</sup> were the most digitally oriented programmes, and they do achieve the two highest income levels amongst all programmes in the long term (=in the Established Career stage). However, notably BACM achieves a lower than average income at the early career stage. Either their graduates over time achieve the best income growth, or potentially the digital industry sectors ten to 15 years ago were structurally set up differently, warranting higher income levels at the time. In the latter case, more recent graduates possibly won't be able to achieve the same levels again in their future.

<sup>34</sup> Especially the extremely high income at established career for BAFA of HKAS is based on a sample size

<sup>35</sup> The sample sizes for most of the individual figures for different career stages are based on a comparatively small number of survey responses and may serve for indicative comparison only.

<sup>36</sup> As the BAVA doesn't have any graduates at the established career stage, i.e. its mean overall income should not be compared directly with other programmes.

<sup>37</sup> PolyU's drop in income level at established career stage is likely also a statistical artefact (n=6).

<sup>38</sup> The extremely high income at established career for BAFA of HKAS is based on a sample size of merely n=3 and shouldn't be considered valid.

<sup>39</sup> BScDGC of HKBU is an interesting case study in its own right: after HKBU decided to open the BAVA programme in 2005 with a much larger growth potential, BScDGC gradually went into decline and eventually stopped admission in 2012; in fact, the surveyed cohort of 2015 was the last cohort to graduate from that programme. The effects of the shut-down process – poor publicity, withdrawal of instructors, re-distribution of resources – apparently had an immediate effect even on the income levels of its graduates, which dropped from the comparatively highest (in the established career group) to a still good second rank (for the early career group) within a five years period.

Checking income levels by gender shows that female creatives on average earn less than their male counterparts (on average approx. 6% less), yet there is no (not yet) statistically significant correlation between gender and income. Thus, based on this survey's data no clear evidence of gender-based income discrimination against women can be established.

Further to level of income, it's of particular interest to consider in which sectors creative graduates in Hong Kong currently are mostly occupied in. Within this consideration it must however be noted that the questionnaire asked for the industry sector to which the employer/employing company belonged, not into which sector the specific occupation of the graduate within the company fitted in. Thus, if a participant indicated that they worked in the Banking & Finance sector, this could be as a bank clerk (=non-creative) or as an in-house graphic designer (=creative). Similarly, a job in an Advertising Agency could be as art director (=creative) or as assistant to the CEO (=non-creative). Tab. III.7 thus may only be read as an overview of which sectors employ creative graduates to what extent, not necessarily as an indication of their actual professional preoccupation.

**Tab. III.7 Sectors of employment of creatives in full or part-time employment (multiple answers were allowed)<sup>40</sup>**

<i>Sector</i>	<i>Industry</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>PolyU</i>	<i>HKAS</i>
<b>Creative Sectors</b>	Advertising and marketing	20 (5.9%)	3 (5.4%)	0 (0%)
	Architecture	7 (2.1%)	4 (7.1%)	0 (0%)
	Crafts	4 (1.2%)	0 (0%)	1 (3.4%)
	Design (Product, Graphic and Fashion Design)	51 (15%)	26 (46.4%)	2 (6.9%)
	Film, TV, video, radio and photography	24 (7.1%)	1 (1.8%)	1 (3.4%)
	IT, software and computer services	17 (5%)	2 (3.6%)	1 (3.4%)
	Publishing	10 (2.9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	Music, performing and visual arts	24 (7.1%)	0 (0%)	3 (10.3%)
	Museums, galleries and libraries	25 (7.4%)	1 (1.8%)	1 (3.4%)
<b>Cultural Sectors</b>	Teaching	77 (22.6%)	3 (5.4%)	12 (41.4%)
	Community-based cultural activities	17 (5%)	4 (7.1%)	1 (3.4%)
<b>Non-Creative Sectors</b>	Banking and finance	3 (0.9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

<sup>40</sup> To accommodate especially graduates holding (several) part-time jobs multiple responses to this question were allowed.

Government/civil service	4 (1.2%)	3 (5.4%)	1 (3.4%)
Health and social work	1 (0.3%)	1 (1.8%)	1 (3.4%)
Hotel and catering	3 (0.9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Leisure (incl. tourism)	2 (0.6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Manufacturing/ engineering	6 (1.8%)	1 (1.8%)	1 (3.4%)
Research and development	2 (0.6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Retailing	10 (2.9%)	3 (5.4%)	1 (3.4%)
Other	33 (9.7%)	4 (7.1%)	3 (10.3%)
	n= 340	56	29

In this sense, Tab. III.7 shows 81.3% of creative graduates employed full or part-time at the time of the survey worked in one of the creative and cultural sectors, with Education as the largest single sector (22.6%), followed by Design (15%). These are quite in line with findings also in other constituencies – e.g. in UK 80.9% of creative graduates work in the creative and cultural sectors, with the most common equally being Design (17.7%) and Education (14.4%)<sup>41,42</sup>. The indicative data from PolyU and HKAS suggests that possibly varying programme foci do direct their graduates into particular sectors more directly – e.g. as might be expected from a dedicated Design programme, a much larger proportion of BDes graduates went on to pursue a career in the Design sector and significantly fewer went to Education than in the overall population.

Tab. III.8 – in difference to Tab. III.7 – shows the sectors in which graduates work self-employed and/or as freelancers. Of those creatives 87.1% contribute to the creative and cultural sectors, essentially a very similar proportion to those employed. This coherently high retention percentage shows that local creative undergraduate programmes do successfully cater to the creative and cultural sectors.

The differences in Tab. III.7 lie in the individual sectors: e.g. a significantly higher proportion of the self-employed work in Design (34.6%), and – instead of Education – Film, TV, video, radio and photography comes in a very strong second at 20.5%; maybe not surprisingly, teaching is apparently largely delivered by employed staff. For the creative self-employed/freelancers job-opportunities come most likely from their “home” sectors.

<sup>41</sup> Ball, Pollard, and Stanley, ‘Creative Graduates Creative Futures: A Major Longitudinal Study Undertaken between 2008 and 2010 of the Career Patterns of Graduates in Art, Design, Crafts and Media Subjects Qualifying in 2002, 2003 and 2004 from 26 UK Higher Education Institutions’, 2010. p. 136.

<sup>42</sup> The higher percentage for Education in Hong Kong may be the result of a particularly strong demand for visual arts teachers related to a significant change of secondary school curricula between 2009 and 2012.

**Tab. III.8 Sectors of employment of creatives working self-employed or freelance (multiple answers were allowed)<sup>43</sup>**

<i>Sector</i>	<i>Industry</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>PolyU</i>	<i>HKAS</i>
<b>Creative Sectors</b>	Advertising and marketing	4 (3.1%)	4 (18.2%)	0 (0%)
	Architecture	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	Crafts	8 (6.2%)	2 (9.1%)	1 (4%)
	Design (Product, Graphic and Fashion Design)	44 (34.6%)	9 (40.9%)	7 (28%)
	Film, TV, video, radio and photography	26 (20.4%)	0 (0%)	1 (4%)
	IT, software and computer services	2 (1.6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	Publishing	4 (3.1%)	1 (4.5%)	2 (8%)
	Music, performing and visual arts	8 (6.2%)	0 (0%)	6 (24%)
	Museums, galleries and libraries	2 (1.6%)	0 (0%)	1 (4%)
	<b>Cultural Sectors</b>	Teaching	10 (7.9%)	0 (0%)
Community-based cultural activities		3 (2.4%)	1 (4.5%)	3 (12%)
<b>Non-Creative Sectors</b>	Banking and finance	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	Government/civil service	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	Health and social work	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	Hotel and catering	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	Leisure (incl. tourism)	1 (0.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	Manufacturing/ engineering	1 (0.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	Research and development	0 (0%)	1 (4.5%)	0 (0%)
	Retailing	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

<sup>43</sup> To accommodate especially graduates holding (several) contracts at a time, multiple responses to this question were allowed.

Other	14 (11%)	4 (18.2%)	2 (8%)
	n= 151 <sup>44</sup>	22	25

As Tab III.9 further shows, businesses providing professional opportunities – through employment and/or freelance jobs – to creative practitioners are either very big (>100 employees) or very small (<5), suggesting that creatives are either employed by large companies that have use for and can afford their own in-house visual artists, or they work for small entities likely specialising specifically in a visual arts service. Medium-sized businesses (between 21 and 100 employees) however appear to be less interested in what Hong Kong's creatives have to offer.

**Tab. III.9 Size of businesses employing Hong Kong's visual artists by career stages**

<i>Business Size (in no. of employees)</i>	<i>Early Career</i>	<i>Advanced Career</i>	<i>Established Career</i>	<i>Overall</i>
<5	51 (21.7%)	24 (24%)	7 (22.6%)	82 (22.4%)
5–20	59 (25.1%)	21 (21%)	3 (9.7%)	83 (22.7%)
21–50	31 (13.1%)	15 (15%)	2 (6.5%)	48 (13.1%)
51–100	37 (15.7%)	11 (11%)	3 (9.7%)	51 (13.9%)
>100	57 (24.3%)	29 (29%)	16 (51.6%)	102 (27.9%)
	n= 235	100	31	366

As in previous tables, it's rather remarkable also in this overview how consistent distributions are across career stages – with one exception: 51.6% of established creatives work for large employers, a sudden upwards jump from 29% in the career group before. This figure would imply that after ten years in business almost a quarter of any creative cohort will suddenly decide to work for a large corporation. While this is of course a possibility – maybe after a decade of precarious life in SMEs, creatives eventually opt for the relative safety and certainty of corporate jobs when they reach the age to set up families etc. – but this could also be an artefact of the rather small sample size; or – as we don't have any data from before 15 years – potentially the labour market in the early 2000s was structurally very different, and graduates at the time did indeed enter the corporate world directly after leaving university for good.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Despite the eligible population for the question included 151 creatives, a fairly large proportion of them didn't respond to this question at all, possibly because they couldn't/didn't want to place themselves within single sectors. There is thus a higher degree of uncertainty related to these figures.

<sup>45</sup> The latter scenario would suggest that at some point in the early 2000s, big companies changed their employment strategies and started outsourcing creative work. In combination with the observation of BACM's unusual established career income level (Tab. III.7), this could be an indication of a relation to the burst of the Dotcom bubble around that time.



These initial observations on income, employment status, and employment area subsequently allow to investigate for potential correlations between these criteria. As it turns out,

- there is a significant difference in income levels between those working employed and those self-employed/freelancing, with incomes for those employed being significantly higher;
- there is a significant difference in income between those employed in the creative and cultural sectors, and those employed in the non-creative sectors, with income levels in non-creative sectors significantly higher

than in the creative and cultural sectors (creative mean income: HKD205,731; non-creative mean income: HKD234,938); yet

- there is no significant income difference between the self-employed across all sectors, creative or non-creative; but
- there are significant differences between incomes in different sectors. E.g. the highest mean incomes may be achieved in Architecture, IT/Software/Computer Services, and – interestingly – Community-based Cultural Activities; the lowest mean incomes are achieved in Crafts, Music/Performing & Visual Arts, and Museums/Galleries/Libraries.

In short: economically, it’s advisable for a local creative graduate to seek employment, preferably in a non-creative sector. If the graduate nonetheless ends up – voluntarily or not – to be working self-employed or freelance, it’d better be in architecture or software development.

As shown above, the income situation for creative graduates in Hong Kong – while perceived as precarious – in effect very positively compares to other industry sectors, which may be one of the reasons for generally high levels of work satisfaction in the field (Tab. III.10).

**Tab. III.10 Work satisfaction** (n=453; excl. PolyU/HKAS)

	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Mean</i>
I’m satisfied with my work	24 (4.1%)	135 (23.1%)	369 (63.2%)	56 (9.6%)	2.79
I’m able to be creative in my work	35 (6%)	130 (22.3%)	337 (57.7%)	82 (14%)	2.78
My work is in my chosen career	57 (9.8%)	192 (32.9%)	270 (46.2%)	65 (11.1%)	2.57
There are career opportunities open to me	27 (4.6%)	163 (27.9%)	330 (56.5%)	64 (11%)	2.74
My work allows me a lot of autonomy and independence	30 (5.1%)	128 (21.9%)	332 (56.8%)	94 (16.1%)	2.83
I’m over-qualified for my current job	43 (7.4%)	350 (59.9%)	163 (27.9%)	28 (4.8%)	2.31

I'm wrongly qualified for my current job	94 (16.1%)	351 (60.1%)	119 (20.4%)	20 (3.4%)	2.13
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According to the Employee Job Happiness Index 2016<sup>46</sup>, Hong Kongers in general rate their job happiness at 5.56 on a scale of 10, i.e. essentially as neutral. Comparatively, Hong Kong's creatives value their work satisfaction at 2.79 on a scale of 4 – i.e. a 6.98 when transferred to a scale of 10 – which is certainly leaning towards the happier end of the spectrum. All other responses related to work satisfaction also distinctly lean towards the positive side, thus potentially Pierre-Michel Menger's findings on the attraction of creative professions holds true also in Hong Kong:

"The non-monetary part of the revenues (the flow of remunerations and psychological and social gratifications, attractive working conditions, fewer routine tasks, and such) provisionally or durably compensates for the lost revenue."<sup>47</sup>

However, as one creative put it in her follow up interview to the survey: "It's okay for now; it's not enough for the future."

## IV. Creative Practice

*Summary:*

- About 44% of creative graduates attempt to make a living on their creative practices; roughly a third of them merely practice their art as a hobby, while more than 20% have given up on practice entirely.

- Women are twice as likely as men to leave their creative practice behind.

- The most popular areas of professional creative practice are the Graphic Arts and Drawing & Painting; more than 50% of all creative practice is in "flat" media.

Further to their employment statuses and income, survey participants were more specifically asked about the personal creative practices. While most of the respondents declared "to be creative" as part of their professional activities, this doesn't necessarily imply that they'd actually have a creative practice. E.g. a survey respondent could be creatively well engaged as an art director of an ad agency, yet not produce any creative output of their own. The survey questionnaire therefore included a separate section to specifically investigate engagement with creative practice.

**Tab. IV.1a Engagement with creative practice** (n=453; excl. PolyU and HKAS)

<i>Level of Engagement</i>	<i>Early</i>	<i>Advanced</i>	<i>Established</i>	<i>Overall</i>
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<sup>46</sup> 'Employee Job Happiness Index 2016: Strategies to Engage, Motivate and Retain Top Talent' (seek asia, 2016).

<sup>47</sup> Menger, *The Economics of Creativity*, p. 9.

	<i>Career</i>	<i>Career</i>	<i>Career</i>	
I have nothing to do with visual arts anymore	7 (2.4%)	5 (4.1%)	1 (2.8%)	13 (2.9%)
I don't have a creative practice, but I still regularly appreciate visual arts	59 (20%)	23 (18.7%)	8 (22.2%)	90 (19.9%)
I practice in my area of visual arts, but it's more of a hobby than to make a living	98 (33.3%)	43 (35%)	11 (30.6%)	152 (33.6%)
I may not be there yet, but I'm beginning a creative career	48 (16.3%)	15 (12.2%)	4 (11.1%)	67 (14.8%)
I make some money with my practice, but it's not enough to survive	39 (13.3%)	20 (16.3%)	4 (11.1%)	63 (13.9%)
I can survive, but sometimes it's still difficult	37 (12.6%)	11 (8.9%)	3 (8.3%)	51 (11.3%)
I'm firmly established	5 (1.7%)	5 (4.1%)	4 (11.1%)	14 (3.1%)
I'm known beyond my area of work	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2.8%)	1 (0.2%)
I'm established but working less intensively than before	1 (0.3%)	1 (0.8%)	0 (0%)	2 (0.4%)
	n= 294	123	36	453

Based on creatives' self-declarations<sup>48</sup>, Tab. IV.1a shows that 43.7% of creative graduates continue making a living in their respective creative practice after graduation; another 33.6% still practice their subject of choice yet rely on other sources of income to make a living; about 22.7% have entirely given up on practical creation, but even of those the vast majority regularly appreciates visual arts in other ways.

Similar to the findings in Tab. III.5, also the creative practice figures feature a large precarious proportion of overall 40% graduates, who are attempting to survive on their creative practices, yet cannot or merely barely make ends meet. Again, it's notable also here that even amongst the established practitioners approx. 30% still struggle. It speaks for the determination and dedication of the creatives that they apparently cannot be deterred, but of course a continuing strain of this kind couldn't help the development of a long-term sustainable creative ecology.

Apart from this distribution as such, its stability throughout all career stages is remarkable. E.g. it could've been expected that more fresh graduates would attempt creative careers after leaving university and then gradually drop out disappointedly, but effectively the proportion of "practice dropouts" varies by 2.6% only across 15 years. Similarly, those who practice their subject merely as a hobby at all times very consistently make up for about a third of the population – even directly after graduation. This may indicate that slightly more than half of those studying a creative undergraduate programme indeed have no intention of pursuing a practical creative career from the start.

To verify the findings of Tab. IV.1a, and to additionally understand more about the intensities of practice

<sup>48</sup> By default, self-declarations are subjective in nature and are therefore difficult to verify.

engagement, the survey also asked about quantitative achievements in creative practices.

**Tab. IV.1b Achievements in creative practice since graduation from BA** (multiple answers were allowed)

<i>Achievement</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>PolyU</i>	<i>HKAS</i>
Had a one-person show at a major gallery/recognised craft venue	21 (2.6%)	0 (0%)	2 (1.7%)
Had a one-person show at a smaller gallery/craft venue	52 (6.3%)	1 (1.1%)	11 (9.2%)
Had a work or works selected for exhibition at a major gallery/recognised craft venue	65 (7.9%)	7 (7.4%)	12 (10.1%)
Had a work or works selected for exhibition at a smaller gallery/craft venue	119 (14.5%)	8 (8.4%)	23 (19.3%)
Received a major public or private commission (> HKD50,000)	36 (4.4%)	5 (5.3%)	7 (5.9%)
Sold at least one work for HKD50,000 or more to a public/private gallery, public/private institution or other private collector	24 (2.9%)	1 (1.1%)	6 (5%)
My work was selected for publication in a book or professional journal	116 (14.1%)	19 (20%)	15 (12.6%)
Had a work or works selected for inclusion on a reputable professional online site	51 (6.2%)	5 (5.3%)	4 (3.4%)
Contributed in a significant way to the development of a major (community) arts project	34 (4.1%)	1 (1.1%)	9 (7.6%)
Project/s I've completed generated employment opportunities for other artists	28 (3.4%)	2 (2.1%)	5 (4.2%)
Was invited to work on community development in the non-arts sector	35 (4.3%)	3 (3.2%)	5 (4.2%)
Received a patent (or similar kind of intellectual property protection) for a creative project	12 (1.5%)	3 (3.2%)	1 (0.8%)
My practice has been recognised as a best practice model, i.e. it has been used by others after me	28 (3.4%)	6 (6.3%)	5 (4.2%)
Played a major role in developing or presenting a festival	22 (2.7%)	2 (2.1%)	2 (1.7%)
Played a significant role in setting up a venue for visual arts presentation (e.g. a gallery, a magazine, etc.)	31 (3.8%)	1 (1.1%)	5 (4.2%)
Other	31 (3.8%)	3 (3.2%)	3 (2.5%)
None of the above	117 (14.2%)	28 (29.5%)	4 (3.4%)
	454	73	58

Essentially, the picture emerging from Tab. IV.1b does support the self-declared standings from Tab. IV.1a: most achievements were declared for the less prolific categories (group shows, smaller galleries) suggesting indeed a more emerging scene.

Considering in more detail only those that leave creative practice behind, Tab. IV.1c shows that proportionally consistently throughout all career stages more women abandon their practice than men. This equals an attrition rate of 25.7% for women, and 12.8% for men, i.e. female creatives are twice as likely to turn their backs on creative practice than their male counterparts.

**Tab. IV.1c Abandonment of creative practice only** (n=103; excl. PolyU and HKAS)

<i>Level of Engagement</i>		<i>Early Career</i>	<i>Advanced Career</i>	<i>Established Career</i>	<i>Overall</i>
I have nothing to do with visual arts anymore/ I don't have a creative practice, but I still regularly appreciate visual arts	M	9 (13.6%)	3 (10.7%)	1 (11.1%)	14 (13.6%)
	F	57 (86.4%)	25 (89.3%)	8 (88.9%)	89 (86.4%)
	n=	66	28	9	103

When asked for reasons for leaving behind their creative practice, many didn't respond thus leaving some room for speculation (Tab. IV.2). Of those responses obtained, some outcomes are quite expectable (e.g. lack of financial return), others are possibly more surprising (e.g. lack of talent). Given that more women quit the visual arts than men, it's however certainly notable that not a single creative left the creative and cultural sectors for feeling discriminated for gender.

**Tab. IV.2 Reasons for Abandonment of creative practice** (n=48; multiple answers were allowed)

<i>Reasons</i>	<i>Early Career</i>	<i>Advanced Career</i>	<i>Established Career</i>	<i>Overall</i>
<i>Economic factors</i>				
Lack of work opportunities	19	5	0	24
Lack of financial return from creative practice	25	10	0	35
Lack of access to funding or other financial support	8	5	0	13
<i>Time constraints</i>				
Lack of time to do creative work due to other pressures and responsibilities	12	10	0	21
<i>Access difficulties</i>				
No access to appropriate space for creative practice	11	9	0	20
Difficulty accessing training or education	7	1	0	8

Difficulty accessing materials or equipment	5	5	0	10
Difficulty accessing markets or promotion	17	3	0	20
<i>Personal issues</i>				
Lack of support and encouragement from family	4	3	0	7
Lack of support and encouragement from friends	1	0	0	1
Lack of work appreciation in society	7	3	1	11
Living with a disability	1	0	0	1
Wrong temperament to succeed	4	4	0	8
Insufficient talent or not prepared to take risks	16	5	2	23
Past my peak as an artist	5	1	0	6
<i>Discrimination on the basis of</i>				
Ethnic background	0	0	0	0
Gender	0	0	0	0
Non-English Speaking	2	0	0	2
Non-Chinese Speaking	0	1	0	1
Living with a disability	0	0	0	0
Other factors	3	4	2	9
Don't know	1	0	0	1
	n= 31	15	2	48

Other than establishing engagement with creative practice per se, it's of course interesting to determine which practices are most common, as this may help various stakeholders to more appropriately cater towards the actual needs of local creative practitioners. Asked for their creative practice (Tab. IV.3), not surprisingly – given the comparatively large proportion of creative graduates having their day jobs in the Design sector – the largest group declared to practice in the graphics arts (15.4%), followed by Drawing & Painting (12.2%). Again, considering that visual arts education in Hong Kong's schools until the curriculum changes in 2012 were essentially driven by drawing and painting only, this may be hardly surprising.

It is however notable that the first five most mentioned practices are all two-dimensional or screen-based, suggesting that almost half of all creative practice in Hong Kong (46.5%; 49% if additionally counting the Chinese Arts following further down) is flat. The most common reason stated for this observation refers to issue of availability of space for equipment, production and storage of three-dimensional work, and there is certainly at least a grain of truth to that. However, these most popular practices also best cater to the needs of galleries, art fairs and ultimately local and regional collectors, thus it's probably fair to assume that local creative practitioners are also adapting – consciously or unconsciously – to market demands.

**Tab. IV.3 Area(s) of creative practice** (multiple answers were allowed; responses ordered by frequency of occurrence)

<i>Areas of Practice</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>PolyU</i>	<i>HKAS</i>
Graphic Art/Design (incl. Book Design)	156	35	8

	(15.4%)	(19.8%)	(8.4%)
Drawing & Painting	124 (12.2%)	17 (9.6%)	16 (16.8%)
Photography	100 (9.9%)	19 (10.7%)	9 (9.5%)
Illustration/Cartoon/Comics	91 (9%)	17 (9.6%)	3 (3.2%)
Moving image (incl. film, TV, video, motion graphics)	87 (8.6%)	8 (4.5%)	3 (3.2%)
Installation	77 (7.6%)	6 (3.4%)	12 (12.6%)
Community-based/Participatory Art/Design	50 (4.9%)	4 (2.3%)	7 (7.4%)
New/Digital Media	48 (4.7%)	3 (1.7%)	1 (1.1%)
Ceramics/Pottery	36 (3.5%)	4 (2.3%)	13 (13.7%)
Object/Product/Furniture design	34 (3.3%)	19 (10.7%)	2 (2.1%)
Sculpture	30 (3%)	1 (0.6%)	7 (7.4%)
Spatial Design/Architecture	28 (2.8%)	14 (7.9%)	2 (2.1%)
Jewellery	26 (2.6%)	4 (2.3%)	0 (0%)
Chinese Arts (incl. Chinese painting/calligraphy/seal-engraving)	25 (2.5%)	1 (0.6%)	3 (3.2%)
Sound Art	19 (1.9%)	2 (1.1%)	0 (0%)
Fibre/Textile/Leather/Wearables/Fashion Design	16 (1.6%)	5 (2.8%)	1 (1.1%)
Other design practice	16 (1.6%)	5 (2.8%)	1 (1.1%)
Printmaking	15 (1.5%)	6 (3.4%)	3 (3.2%)
Other studio art practice	12 (1.2%)	1 (0.6%)	3 (3.2%)
Other craft practice	10 (1%)	5 (2.8%)	0 (0%)
Glass	8 (0.8%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.1%)
None of the above	7	1	0

	(0.7%)	(0.6%)	(0%)
n= 454	73	58	

It comes a bit as a surprise that only a rather small proportion of creatives are engaged in natively digital practices like New/Digital Media, Moving image, and possibly Sound Art (total of these areas: 15.2%), especially considering that with BACM and BScDGC to entire undergraduate programmes catered specifically to that practice section; but, of course, digital tools and applications today feature across all practices, thus digital engagement might be “hidden” in other practice area (e.g. Installation).

An observation merely indirectly deductible from Tab. IV.2 is that almost no practitioners provided only one practice of specialisation. Indeed, a distinguishing feature of Hong Kong’s visual arts scene might be the close integration artistic practices with Design. Prominent examples include Amy Cheung, Bryan Chung, Kan Tai-Keung, Freeman Lau, Map Office, Kingsley Ng, Kacey Wong, Stanley Wong, and Wucius Wong, all of whom have practiced and/or taught Design in parallel to their artistic production. Notably, the majority of artist-cum-designers are men; female fine artists seem to end up having day jobs in (school) teaching and/or in arts administration/curation instead. If this initial observation could be backed up by further research, it may possibly offer another explanation to why female graduates seem to drift out of their practice more easily than their male colleagues: the demands and schedules of non-/less related day jobs gradually take over, more so than a practice in Design that at least is still practical in nature, allows for a more flexible timeframe, and contributes to a public “artist image”.

## V. Education Pathways

### *Summary:*

- *Pre-tertiary visual arts education has little measurable impact on future economic success of visual artists.*
- *Undergraduate degree classifications are indicative of future economic achievements of creative graduates.*
- *Work experiences during undergraduate studies correlate with higher future income; international exchanges don't.*
- *Continuing graduate studies have positive effect on income, irrespective whether they're in a creative or non-creative subject.*

The main focus of the Creative Livelihoods Project was to determine the economic situation of creative practitioners working in Hong Kong. It had to be expected that some visual artists would prove to be economically more successful than others, thus it would be of interest to establish whether those top achievers shared any common traits in either their education paths, their personal backgrounds (see section VI. of the report) and/or their career developments. If such common characteristics could be established institutional support systems, educational efforts, but also relevant public policies etc. could be re-calibrated to specifically nurture these characteristics. E.g. if data showed that early childhood exposure to the visual arts had significant impact on future economic performance as a visual artist, then relevant stakeholders could revise kindergarten curricula or offer more educational programmes for kids in local museums to foster



growth of the future creative practitioners. The data from the survey would thus provide important evidence to inform policy making for the creative and cultural sectors, curriculum development at all levels, educational strategies etc., all to improve the general working ecology of the practicing visual artists of Hong Kong.

In this line of thought, to find out about any positive educational influences, survey participants were asked to indicate their exposure to visual arts practice in early childhood (i.e. three to six years old), during their time in primary school (i.e. seven to twelve years old) and secondary school (i.e. 13 to 19 years old). They were further asked to provide information about any tertiary sub-degree and undergraduate degree studies (creative and non-creative, if any), as well as graduate and postgraduate studies following their initial degree.

Setting the baseline, the questionnaire asked whether “During your childhood and teenage-years, were you exposed to any creative visual arts practice at home? E.g. did your parents or relatives practice any creative arts with you etc.?” (see Tab. V.1a) and “During your childhood and teenage-years, did you have the opportunity to regularly appreciate visual arts except for any school activities? E.g. did your parents or relatives take you to museums etc.?” (see Tab. V.1b).

**Tab. V.1a Creative practice in family context** (n=453; excl. PolyU and HKAS)

<i>Frequency of Occurrence</i>	<i>Early Career</i>	<i>Advanced Career</i>	<i>Established Career</i>	<i>Overall</i>
Never	90 (30.6%)	40 (32.5%)	14 (38.9%)	144 (31.8%)
Sometimes	140 (47.6%)	59 (48%)	15 (41.7%)	214 (47.2%)
Regularly	20 (6.8%)	4 (3.3%)	3 (8.3%)	27 (6%)
Often	29 (9.9%)	8 (6.5%)	2 (5.6%)	39 (8.6%)
Always	15 (5.1%)	12 (9.8%)	2 (5.6%)	29 (6.4%)
	n= 294	123	36	453

**Tab. V.1.b Visual arts exposure in family context** (n=453; excl. PolyU and HKAS)

<i>Frequency of Occurrence</i>	<i>Early Career</i>	<i>Advanced Career</i>	<i>Established Career</i>	<i>Overall</i>
Never	110 (37.4%)	47 (38.2%)	15 (41.7%)	172 (38%)
Sometimes	145 (49.3%)	63 (51.2%)	17 (47.2%)	225 (49.7%)
Regularly	19	3	2	24

	(6.5%)	(2.4%)	(5.6%)	(5.3%)
Often	14 (4.8%)	6 (4.9%)	2 (5.6%)	22 (4.9%)
Always	6 (2%)	4 (3.3%)	0 (0%)	10 (2.2%)
	n= 294	123	36	453

Responses to both these questions show that experience of creative practical and/or appreciative experiences with visual arts in the immediate personal context was limited at best for approx. 80% of all young future visual artists. Given the generally low level of educational of parents (see Tab. VI.1 in next chapter), this should be well within expectations.

However, about half (48%) of the later creative graduates received some kind of visual arts education outside of their family context (Tab. V.2): the vast majority of those respondents initially started off further training in visual arts practices at either kindergarten (52.3%) or primary school age (34.1%) in addition to courses and classes offered as parts of institutional curricula<sup>49</sup>.

**Tab. V.2 Starting age of visual arts training** (n=220; excl. PolyU and HKAS)

Age Range	Early Career	Advanced Career	Established Career	Overall Career
0–2 years	5 (3.6%)	2 (3.1%)	0 (0%)	7 (3.2%)
3–6 years	66 (47.5%)	40 (62.5%)	9 (52.9%)	115 (52.3%)
7–9 years	52 (37.4%)	18 (28.1%)	5 (29.4%)	75 (34.1%)
10–12 years	16 (11.5%)	4 (6.3%)	3 (17.6%)	23 (10.5%)
	n= 139	64	17	220

Such training most often came by format of tutorial school lessons (40.9%), but almost as often were delivered as community activities (35.5%). Remarkably though, few of the young practitioners participated in multiple offerings (Tab. V.3), which might be due to time restrictions, financial limitations – or could be an indication that their engagement was more parents than self-initiated.

<sup>49</sup> Essentially all kindergartens and primary schools in Hong Kong also in the 1980s and 1990s had at least some practical visual arts in their respective curricula.

**Tab. V.3 Format of early training** (n=220; excl. PolyU and HKAS)

<i>Format of Training</i>	<i>Early Career</i>	<i>Advanced Career</i>	<i>Established Career</i>	<i>Overall</i>
Individual private lessons	23 (16.5%)	7 (10.9%)	2 (11.8%)	32 (14.5%)
Lessons at tutorial school	57 (41%)	26 (40.6%)	7 (41.2%)	90 (40.9%)
Activities offered by community organisations, NGOs, etc.	45 (32.4%)	25 (39.1%)	8 (47.1%)	78 (35.5%)
Multiple of these	14 (10.1%)	6 (9.4%)	0 (0%)	20 (9.1%)
	n= 139	64	17	220

Secondary school curricula in Hong Kong in the years relevant to this study, generally included required visual arts classes<sup>50</sup> in Forms 1 to 3. This implies that essentially all children attending Hong Kong's public education system – i.e. effectively more than 95% of the survey participants – would have institutionally experienced a basic level of practical visual arts training throughout kindergarten, primary school up until the age of approx. 15. After Form 3, participation in visual arts class however became optional, and merely a small majority (54%) of survey respondents continued to take them (Tab. V.4)<sup>51</sup>.

**Tab. V.4 Visual arts classes at secondary school after Form 3** (n=294<sup>52</sup>; excl. PolyU and HKAS)

<i>Classes taken</i>	<i>Early Career</i>	<i>Advanced Career</i>	<i>Established Career</i>	<i>Overall</i>
Yes	167 (85.2%)	59 (78.7%)	19 (82.6%)	245 (83.3%)
No	29 (14.8%)	16 (21.3%)	4 (17.4%)	49 (16.7%)
	n= 196	75	23	294

In addition to their basic training in school, about 40% of survey respondents received practical visual arts training outside of their secondary school, most commonly again at tutorial schools, but also through community activities and/or private lessons (Tab. V.5).

<sup>50</sup> Such classes were not necessarily offered under the title of "visual arts", but could be called "art & design", "art & culture", or else.

<sup>51</sup> Many secondary schools at the time didn't offer visual arts classes beyond Form 3, thus not taking such classes wasn't necessarily a student choice.

<sup>52</sup> Many secondary schools at the time didn't offer visual arts classes beyond Form 3, thus this question was only to be answered by participants whose schools actually offered such courses, i.e. they had a choice.

**Tab. V.5 Visual arts training outside of secondary school** (n=185; excl. PolyU and HKAS)

<i>Format of Training</i>	<i>Early Career</i>	<i>Advanced Career</i>	<i>Established Career</i>	<i>Overall</i>
Individual private lessons	22 (19.3%)	7 (12.7%)	3 (18.8%)	32 (17.3%)
Lessons at tutorial school	46 (40.4%)	19 (34.5%)	9 (56.3%)	74 (40%)
Activities offered by community organisations, NGOs, etc.	22 (19.3%)	12 (21.8%)	2 (12.5%)	36 (19.5%)
Mentorship (including from traditional elder)	6 (5.3%)	8 (14.5%)	0 (0%)	14 (7.6%)
Multiple of these	18 (15.8%)	9 (16.4%)	2 (12.5%)	29 (15.7%)
	n= 114	55	16	185

The survey thus articulates a rather granulated image of the pre-tertiary education pathways that later creative degree graduates went through: in addition to a commonly shared basic training in the visual arts that all participants went through as part of their formal institutional education, creatives might have had – or not – additional exposure/background in their immediate personal context, during kindergarten and primary school, and/or during secondary school, or multiples of these in varying combinations.

In the attempt to establish which of these experiences are most valuable in terms of future economic success as creative practitioner, the collected data on

- creative practice in family context;
- visual arts appreciation activities in family context;
- private visual arts instruction during kindergarten and primary school years;
- visual arts instruction in secondary school (Forms 4 to 6); and
- visual arts classes outside school during secondary school years

were correlated individually and in combinations with the future income achieved, yet only visual arts classes in parallel to secondary school had a (small) impact on the economic performance of the later visual artist (mean income with outside classes: HKD184,175; mean income without outside classes: HKD175,973); so small indeed it possibly wouldn't cover the expenses originally incurred to pay for the classes.

In total it appears, that while those programmes may be catering to young people's enthusiasm for creative practice, and thus may have an influence on their eventual decision to pursue a visual arts degree, they don't seem to be preparing them at significant level to give them a head start in their respective careers.

After secondary school, Hong Kong’s education system allows for two pathways into university degree programmes: students who pass the required university admission benchmarks<sup>53</sup> may directly join an undergraduate degree programme, which in the period relevant to this survey, by default would take three years. Students, who couldn’t meet the necessary benchmarks could opt to join a sub-degree programme (in the early years usually a Higher Diploma, later also Associate Degree, both of usually two years) and upon its successful completion could be admitted into the undergraduate degree programme with advanced standing (i.e. directly into Year 2). Accordingly, those “Direct Year 2” students in total spent four years – instead of three – on their undergraduate education, and – because of their commonly more vocationally oriented first two years in the sub-degree – often studied with a more applied, professional attitude. Due to various government policy changes etc. over the years, the proportion of Direct Year 2 students across the creative undergraduate programme grew from originally about 15% to almost 35% at the end of the survey period (Tab. V.6).

**Tab. V.6 Sub-degree completed before undergraduate degree studies (n=454; excl. PolyU and HKAS)**

<i>Sub-degree completed</i>	<i>Early Career</i>	<i>Advanced Career</i>	<i>Established Career</i>	<i>Overall</i>
Creative sub-degree	78 (26.4%)	21 (17.1%)	4 (11.1%)	103 (22.7%)
Non-creative sub-degree	17 (5.8%)	9 (7.3%)	0 (0%)	26 (5.7%)
Creative and non-creative sub-degree	8 (2.7%)	3 (2.4%)	1 (2.8%)	12 (2.6%)
None	192 (65.1%)	90 (73.2%)	31 (86.1%)	313 (68.9%)
	n= 295	123	36	454

While not listed in Tab. V.6, it’s possibly interesting to note that PolyU’s BDes programme over the years admitted only 35.6% of its intake directly from secondary schools, with the rest coming from sub-degrees. This may well explain the more professional “air” and “first employment” focus of their programme. Nonetheless, statistically no significant income difference could be found between graduates entering the programme in Year 1 or directly into Year 2; in terms of income, having a sub-degree is neither an advantage nor a disadvantage.

Upon graduation, all programmes under investigation distinguish graduate achievements by degree classifications (Tab. V.7), with the vast majority of graduates achieving 2<sup>nd</sup> Honours<sup>54</sup>. Apparently, it is rather

<sup>53</sup> Usually university admission benchmarks in Hong Kong would define a require min. GPA, plus potentially specific minimum grade in defined subjects. In particular in the creative subjects, university applicants may further have to submit a portfolio of their creative works, attend an interview and/or participate in a practical assessment.

<sup>54</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Honours equal an overall B-grade; 2<sup>nd</sup> Hons, up represents a B+; 2<sup>nd</sup> Hons, low represents a B-.

difficult for creative practice students to achieve 1<sup>st</sup> Honours (overall only 4.6%), which may be due to non-major courses which are commonly required by all of Hong Kong's publicly funded universities<sup>55</sup>.

**Tab. V.7 Degree Classifications** (n=454; excl. PolyU/HKAS)

<i>Programme</i>	<i>Pass</i>	<i>3<sup>rd</sup> Hons</i>	<i>2<sup>nd</sup> Hons, low</i>	<i>2<sup>nd</sup> Hons, up</i>	<i>1<sup>st</sup> Hons</i>
BAFA (CUHK)	0 (0%)	4 (5.7%)	23 (36.9%)	39 (55.7%)	4 (5.7%)
BACM (CityU)	0 (0%)	6 (6%)	27 (27%)	57 (57%)	10 (10%)
BAVA (HKBU)	6 (2.7%)	13 (5.8%)	113 (50.7%)	86 (38.6%)	5 (2.2%)
BScDGC (HKBU)	1 (1.6%)	4 (6.6%)	23 (37.7%)	31 (50.8%)	2 (3.3%)
BDes (PolyU)	1 (1.4%)	4 (5.5%)	27 (37%)	37 (50.7%)	4 (5.5%)
BAFA (HKAS) <sup>56</sup>	27 (46.6%)	1 (1.7%)	1 (1.7%)	8 (13.8%)	20 (34.5%)
	n= 7 (1.5%)	27 (5.9%)	186 (41%)	213 (46.9%)	21 (4.6%)

There is a long academic debate whether exit Grade Point Averages (GPAs) are of any significance and/or indicative of future performance of graduates in their career<sup>57</sup>. For this study at least, statistical analysis shows that there is a linear correlation between degree classification and future income of creative graduates, i.e. exit GPAs from tertiary creative undergraduate programmes in Hong Kong are significantly predictive of subsequent economic success.

In line with earlier considerations about female career progression, it may be noted that only 59% of recipients of 1<sup>st</sup> Honours degrees are female (Tab. V.8), less than could be expected given the gender distribution amongst the graduates, but possibly still within margins of statistical error. If, however, female graduates did over time receive substantially lower grades in university, then this may explain why less female creatives go on to study at graduate and postgraduate level. It would also raise questions why young women leave secondary school on average with higher grades than their male class mates but then lose their competitive edge at tertiary level.

**Tab. V.8 Distribution of First Honours degrees between 2001 and 2015 by programmes**

<sup>55</sup> Today these are known as General Education (GE) courses; in the old system they may have come under a category like Complementary Studies (CS).

<sup>56</sup> The rather unusual distribution of degree classifications in the BAFA of HKAS suggests some misunderstanding of the survey question.

<sup>57</sup> For introductions into the discourse, see Kenneth M. Wilson, 'A Review of Research on the Prediction of Academic Performance After the Freshman Year' (New York, NY: College Entrance Examination Board, 1983) and Arthur J. Cropley, 'Defining and Measuring Creativity: Are Creativity Tests Worth Using?', *Roepfer Review* 23, no. 2 (December 2000): 72–79.

<i>Programme</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Overall</i>
BAFA (CUHK)	1	3	4
BACM (CityU)	5	5	10
BAVA (HKBU)	1	4	5
BScDGC (HKBU)	1	1	2
BDes (PolyU)	1	3	4
BAFA (HKAS) <sup>58</sup>	8	12	20
	n= 8	13	21

However, in addition to considering GPA achievements which reflect academic/creative performances during undergraduate studies, it may be of interest to look into other extra-/co-curricular activities that might have an influence on a creative student’s future career. Of such, academic exchange and student work experiences (internships, placements etc.) are most common, and generally expected to have such impact.

In recent years a lot of efforts have been made by universities to expand their students’ international experiences, which reflects in a 11.4% increase in students going on international academic exchanges during their undergraduate studies from the established to the early career stage (Tab. V.9).

**Tab. V.9 Academic exchanges of min. one term during BA studies (n=454; excl. PolyU and HKAS)**

<i>Exchange completed</i>	<i>Early Career</i>	<i>Advanced Career</i>	<i>Established Career</i>	<i>Overall</i>
Yes	99 (33.6%)	38 (30.9%)	8 (22.2%)	145 (31.9%)
No	196 (66.4%)	85 (69.1%)	28 (77.8%)	309 (68.1%)
	n= 295	123	36	454

The survey didn’t ask for exchange destinations and/or lengths; thus, a detailed consideration isn’t possible without further research. Based on the available data, it is possible to establish that exchanges as experienced by creative graduates between 2001 and 2015 do significantly correlate with future income, yet unfortunately negatively. I.e. graduates who went on international exchanges as students earn less than those that didn’t go on exchange. As it is difficult to imagine why a study exchange should negatively affect future income prospects, this slightly startling finding likely results from another, currently unknown causality. E.g. as 84.8% of students going on exchange were female, the lower income level found may be a reflection not of the exchange experience, but of the students’ gender.

<sup>58</sup> The rather unusual distribution of degree classifications in the BAFA of HKAS suggests some misunderstanding of the survey question. The number of 1<sup>st</sup> Honours awarded is therefore probably not correctly surveyed.

In difference to that, work experiences during undergraduate studies (Tab. V.10) are indicative of a significantly higher income in the future: there is significant correlation between having a work experience during undergraduate studies and future income. This is line with findings abroad<sup>59</sup>.

**Tab. V.10 Work experience (e.g. internship) during undergraduate studies** (n=454; excl. PolyU and HKAS)

<i>Work experience completed</i>	<i>Early Career</i>	<i>Advanced Career</i>	<i>Established Career</i>	<i>Overall</i>
Yes	199 (67.5%)	81 (65.9%)	26 (72.2%)	306 (67.4%)
No	96 (32.5%)	42 (34.1%)	10 (27.8%)	148 (32.6%)
	n= 295	123	36	454

It has to be pointed out however that the data may merely indicate a statistically correlation but doesn't initially allow deductions as for the reasons of this correlation. While it could be that work placements allow students to gather valuable professional experiences, build personal networks and establish relations with future employers – as will commonly be argued by educators and institutions – it may also be that those students who go on work experiences more pro-active, more determined, more career-driven in the first place. At least, Linda Ball's research in the UK<sup>60</sup> suggests that graduates value self-organised work experiences higher than those organised by their institutions, which would potentially point towards the latter causality.

Finally, the survey also asked for continuing education efforts after the completion of the initial creative undergraduate programme. At the time of the survey, a bit more than 30% of creative graduates had completed further formal education programmes, most often master programmes, closely followed by Postgraduate Certificates (PgC) and/or Postgraduate Diploma (PgD), very few PhDs (Tab. V.11).

**Tab. V.11 Further formal education completed after undergraduate degree studies** (n=454; excl. PolyU and HKAS)

<i>Further education completed</i>	<i>Early Career</i>	<i>Advanced Career</i>	<i>Established Career</i>	<i>Overall</i>
Creative education	41 (13.9%)	33 (26.8%)	6 (16.7%)	80 (17.6%)
Non-creative education	14 (4.7%)	12 (9.8%)	12 (33.3%)	38 (8.4%)
Creative and non-creative education	8	11	8	27

<sup>59</sup> Ball, Pollard, and Stanley, 'Creative Graduates Creative Futures: A Major Longitudinal Study Undertaken between 2008 and 2010 of the Career Patterns of Graduates in Art, Design, Crafts and Media Subjects Qualifying in 2002, 2003 and 2004 from 26 UK Higher Education Institutions', 2010, p. 47ff.

<sup>60</sup> Ball, Pollard, and Stanley, p. 47ff.



	(2.7%)	(8.9%)	(22.2%)	(5.9%)
None	232 (78.6%)	67 (54.5%)	10 (27.8%)	309 (68.1%)
	n= 295	123	36	454

As it turns out, continuing education after the completion of the initial creative undergraduate degree has a significant influence on the future income of graduates as with further education they will generally earn more than without. Again, the data doesn't allow for a deduction of causality, as in terms of income it makes no difference whether those further studies are in a creative or non-creative subject, and at which level they're pursued. Simply continuing your education in any way, takes economic effect.

## VI. Personal Backgrounds

### Summary:

- A broad majority of Hong Kong's creative graduates are first generation graduates in their families.
- Most of Hong Kong's visual artists come from lower income background.

It's commonly understood that Hong Kong's university population even today is characterised by a high percentage of first generation university students<sup>61</sup>, and creative practice students in this respect are no different to their non-creative counterparts: the vast majority come from families in which neither parent holds a tertiary degree (Tab. VI.1), and many come from lower income backgrounds (Tab. VI.2).

This has a variety of immediate implications throughout a creative's career:

- families from this background will often not be in the position to support a child's creative aspirations, thereby putting it into a position to even consider a creative career;
- as families will hold high economic, but also reputational expectations on their child's future career, pursuing a creative subject with a less defined and/or predictable career path will require more justification/convincing than other more "professional" choices with more predictable economic outlook;
- pursuing creative subjects require financial resources for materials, production costs, space, training etc.; lack thereof will limit creative development;
- benefits of a tertiary education are commonly "measured" against fairly short-term financial success (=higher first income), resulting in pressure to take up full-time employment directly after graduation, which in return curbs time for young creative graduates to establish themselves in a market with very particular demands;

<sup>61</sup> See e.g. the previously mentioned study New Forum and New Youth Forum, 'Comparative Study on Salaries for University Graduates in Hong Kong'.

- children – especially girls – from these backgrounds have fewer role models in their direct context to emulate.

**Tab. VI.1 Parents' educational background** (n=524; incl. PolyU/HKAS)

	<i>Early Career</i>	<i>Advanced Career</i>	<i>Established Career</i>
Both parents with tertiary degree	19 (5.6%)	7 (5.2%)	2 (3.9%)
One parent with tertiary degree	38 (11.2%)	14 (10.4%)	3 (5.9%)
No parent with tertiary degree	281 (83.1%)	114 (84.4%)	46 (90.2%)

These implications articulate e.g. in an – admittedly very weak – trend between the educational level of visual artists' fathers and their future professional income<sup>62</sup>. I.e. the higher educated the parents of a creative graduate, the higher the income she will achieve in the future.

Similar to parental education levels, there's also a trend – that doesn't however amount to a statistical correlation – of a visual artist's future income relating to their family's income during their upbringing: the higher a creative's family income during her childhood, the better she will probably do financially herself in the future<sup>63</sup>.

**Tab. VI.2 Monthly family income when growing up** (n=581)

<i>Ranges of Monthly Income</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>PolyU</i>	<i>HKAS</i>
HKD9,999 or below	32 (7.1%)	8 (11%)	8 (13.8%)
HKD10,000–HKD24,999	199 (44.2%)	28 (38.4%)	22 (37.9%)
HKD25,000–HKD49,999	110 (24.4%)	23 (31.5%)	12 (20.7)
HKD50,000–HKD74,999	33 (7.3%)	5 (6.8%)	4 (6.9%)
HKD75,000–HKD99,999	8 (1.8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
HKD100,000 or above	7	2	2

<sup>62</sup> The weak correlation established may be due to the generally small sample of parent degree holders, particularly of mothers with tertiary degrees. Statistically, therefore only a trend with father's income can be established, but it should be assumed that mothers' and/or two parental degrees would show a similar effect.

<sup>63</sup> The mean incomes of creatives linearly follow the incomes of their family, except for those of the highest income families that experience a sudden, abrupt drop. I.e. there might be a correlation between family income and visual artist's income except for the group from the fairly well-off background.

	(1.6%)	(2.7%)	(3.4%)
Don't know/Don't want to say	61 (13.6%)	7 (9.6%)	10 (17.2%)
	n= 450	73	58

## Summary and Conclusion

Despite exponential growth of tertiary creative education offerings since 2001, the community of locally educated visual artists remains comparatively small, especially considering the total population of Hong Kong creative and cultural industries as reported by the government. Local creative and cultural industries employ 5.7% of the work force, which is comparable to other industrialised societies, thus further quantitative growth of the creative work force may reach its limits soon. However, as in the last 15 years merely approx. 5,000 potential members of the creative work force of approx. 210,000 graduated with a local undergraduate degree, it seems quite plausible that there should exist ample space to improve the quality of local creative work force. This would however require substantial further efforts in expanding and intensifying creative education across all levels.

Although the average income situation of Hong Kong's creative population appears to be comparatively reasonable, creative practitioners experience their economic situation as continuously financially precarious even at established career stages. As achievable income in non-creative sectors is higher, given the opportunity, especially female creatives will consider leaving creative practice and ultimately the creative and cultural sectors behind. Considering the comparatively small number of highly educated creative practitioners available to the labour market, this isn't a sustainable situation, and should be countered by more and new incentives to remain in the field.

It will be crucial for the future development of the creative and cultural sectors to especially tap into the extensively under-utilised potential of its female constituency. While there may not be enough statistic evidence to prove systematic gender discrimination in the field, there are multiple hints suggesting that female visual artists are disadvantaged throughout their careers especially in terms of opportunities and recognition, which eventually negatively affects their economic livelihoods.

It's good news for local tertiary creative education providers that their offerings have the intended impact on the creative and cultural sectors; apparently the variety of undergraduate – and also graduate – programmes available all do prepare their graduates with different foci, yet at comparable levels for their respective careers. However, it appears that pre-tertiary visual arts education in Hong Kong under-achieves significantly: children/teenagers participating in such activities don't achieve any advantage over those who didn't attend.

## Suggestions for Actions

Based on the above conclusions, various actions may be considered to improve the personal situation of local creative practitioners, eventually for the benefit of Hong Kong's creative and cultural ecology.

Special support should be given to female visual artists by

- promoting suitable role-models;
- providing dedicated support programmes for women (e.g. residencies, grant etc.);
- setting binding female quotas for publicly funded grants/awards; and
- legislation and policies ensuring equal pay.

Creative practitioners experience their economic situation as precarious, yet they are – apparently – in an economically more comfortable situation than many others. Thus, any actions taken may aim at improving the (self) perception of the local ecology by providing more (obvious) opportunities and increasing public recognition of the visual arts. E.g.

- institutional tender policies may be appropriated to allow more room for consideration beyond “lowest price”;
- standard contracts for creative services can be amended to be more considerate of the creative process and/or the economic/legal situation of the creative; and
- a default percentage for art may be introduced for all infrastructure projects beyond a certain budget.

The very small proportion of local creative graduates working in the local creative and cultural industries suggests that the majority of those employees must either get their degrees from other providers – possibly internationally, though the low-income background of majority of the student base would suggest a high proportion of their education to be obtained locally – or, they may indeed not have any relevant degree at all. Thus,

- concerted efforts should be made to improve the general education/training level across the creative and cultural sectors;
- eventually, a professional accreditation system might be considered to ensure a minimum quality standard.

As pre-tertiary visual arts education doesn't appear to be very effective in terms of giving future visual artists a head-start into their career

- a round table with stakeholders should be established to develop educational standards, streamline hand-over points between age-groups, diversify offerings;
- creative practice education should be made accessible for all age groups more easily (deeper community embedding etc.; and
- a “Greenhouse” programme for comprehensive talent identification and development in the visual arts should be developed and implemented.

Major efforts were necessary in the preparation of this survey project to identify, find, (collect) and review relevant materials to inform the current research. As further research into various detail aspects, but also on the further development of the creative and cultural ecology might be desirable in the future, various stakeholders should agree on a joint (physical) repository/archive to collect such materials coherently and make it accessible.

## Further Research

This initial Creative Livelihoods report will be distributed to various public, private, institutional and non-institutional stakeholders in Hong Kong in March and April 2018, to be followed up with intensive interviews/discussions with respective stakeholders to collect further qualitative feedback.

Additionally, more international references will be sought, to put the particular findings from Hong Kong into a broader international context. All these further findings will then be analysed and interpreted to create a second extended report by the second half of 2018.

It seems appropriate to continuously monitor the development of the local creative and cultural sectors, especially in the light of continuous public efforts to boost the creative and cultural industries to become a flagship of Hong Kong's economy. Similar to other constituencies – e.g. UK, but especially Australia – it thus should be considered to produce this kind of qualitative and quantitative survey/report on a regular basis in five or ten years intervals. This would allow for the impact of any policy changes implemented or macro-socio-political developments to be followed and potentially give direction to further policy amendments in the future. If an agenda for a follow up report was established soon, it could at the time then be conducted with less financial, time and research efforts.

To facilitate such further research, but also for the purpose of providing policy makers, industry experts and educational institutions with a more continuous stream of data for market evaluation etc. it might be worth considering the setup of a collaborative/joint project office like the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP)<sup>64</sup> in the USA, yet at a much smaller scale. E.g. if some of the key stakeholders – namely programme providers but also government departments, NGOs and industry partners – agree on a common entity to regularly report some key data to, it would be relatively easy to e.g. produce quantitative reports on the local creative and cultural scenes annually or even on demand.

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<sup>64</sup> See [snaap.indiana.edu](http://snaap.indiana.edu) for reference.

In particular in the early stages of the project the names and contact information of the creatives graduates had be manually collected from a variety of publicly available sources like graduation catalogues, exhibition records and online materials. For that task, the Asia Art Archive (aaa.org) proved to be an invaluable source, and its staff extremely helpful.

The online survey as such was effectively prepared and conducted by the Centre for the Advancement of Social Sciences Research (CASR) under the leadership of Ms. Channey Chan: much appreciated and certainly recommended to anyone who would like to conduct a similar project again.

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To all those named, and to all those not named, yet not forgotten: Thank you.

## Post Scriptum

Further materials and more visualisations of the further findings of the Creative Livelihoods Project may be found at [creative-livelihoods.org](http://creative-livelihoods.org).

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## Annex: Selected Carrier Cases

*All following case studies are based on individual interviews conducted with graduates from various of Hong Kong's creative undergraduate programmes<sup>65</sup>. In total 22 graduates were interviewed, the following examples were selected for their exemplary character.*

### **Early Career Case 1: Vicky Mak<sup>66</sup>**

*Graduating from the BA (Hons) in Fine Arts of Chinese University Hong Kong in 2015, Vicky Mak has been working as a part-time gallery assistant for several months, which provides her enough flexibility to continue with her creative work in her free time.*

My current job essentially requires me to attend to the gallery exhibition space as well as do some paper work like artist statements or captions for art works on display. I don't have any fixed working hours, which allows me to occasionally do other part-time jobs outside, thus in total my income is not bad. Also for the flexible hours, I'm still able to maintain my creative practice and e.g. participate in exhibitions.

Initially after graduation, I started off as a full-time art administrator. I worked for around eight months, which was very exhausting: the income was low, I only had one day off per week, I needed to use leave days for my creative practice, which then meant I didn't have enough time to rest... I felt extremely stressed. This is when I realised that full-time employment is not for me. I quit that job and found some freelance or part-time work, which turned out to generate a better income than my previous full-time position.

I spent so many years studying visual arts, I would think it a waste if I didn't work in this field. Besides, I don't know anything else. Fortunately, I'm not burdened by any family responsibilities, thus I may spend my income on daily life and creative works. But I certainly can't save any money, art making is expensive. My work supports the present, but it's not enough for the future.

People working in non-creative industries may have their career path more clearly laid out for them, they can predict how many years it will take them to their next promotion or significant raise etc. In visual arts jobs we don't have that. From my past full-time job experience, I'd say the creative industries are small, harder to get ahead in, require lots of over-time, and provide very low income.

I continue producing my artwork (mixed media installations), but I increasingly feel disconnected. I have a friend, who keeps making art at home, but he never publishes anything, only his friends and a few teachers will generally see his work. Can this be it? I feel I'm gradually becoming like him, keep working on my art, but not reaching anyone. Because of this feeling I've recently thought about finding a more meaningful job. Art may be able to change the world, but individual artists can't. I'm wondering how art could get more engaged with the community?

My artwork is not very market compatible, thus I can't earn money with it. Especially in Hong Kong, there are few opportunities for fresh graduates, thus I keep looking for exhibition opportunities elsewhere, like in Taiwan. I feel they are more open-minded and receptive to new ideas. In my experience, it was difficult to

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<sup>65</sup> For privacy reasons, the real names of the interviewees are replaced by pseudonyms.

<sup>66</sup> Interviewed on 2 May 2017.



find opportunities initially; but after I continued working on it, my portfolio became richer, and it became easier. I need to make art, but maybe I should publish it in new ways.

All in all, I am happy, despite my current situation leaves me feeling insecure, nervous, and uncertain of the future. My family is quite supportive. And I am so glad that I had that full-time job immediately after graduation, so I could realise right away that this wasn't the life I want. As a fresh graduate, it's normal to feel confused and lost. But when you keep going, you'll find your way, or at least you learn how to balance the various aspects of your life.

### **Early Career Case 2: Wing Wong<sup>67</sup>**

*Wing Wong is a full-time advertising producer, who graduated from City University's School of Creative Media with a BA (Hons) in Creative Media in 2015. In her spare time, she works as a part-time visual arts tutor.*

In my day job, I'm mainly in charge of the administration of advertisement shoots, communication with clients and team, location scouting etc. As part-time visual arts tutor, I mainly teaching my students on animation, and supervise their visual arts homework from school. However, my day job is so busy that I can only hold lessons during my summer leave or after examinations.

I got into my position via my final year project, for which I chose to shoot a video. After graduation, I got the chance to help a friend who was working for a studio to shoot his film. After the shot, the studio director invited me to manage the production, and then I've been here for the last two years.

My situation is quite different to my fellow graduates, as I'm married, and my husband can support the family. My income thus only needs to support my child and my daily expenses, but I have to work from Monday to Sunday, 24 hours on call stand-by for clients in case they had any questions or changes. It wouldn't actually take much money to have a creative practice – animation essentially only needs a computer – but I don't have the time. If I'd quit my job however, I couldn't support being a full-time visual artist. Thus, at the moment, I can merely dream of making something. Nonetheless, I still feel I'm working in the visual arts.

My friend works in IT, his salary increases a lot every time he changes company. There's a formula for salary calculation in non-visual arts industry, based on seniority rather than portfolio. That doesn't happen in our field; we pay more attention to portfolio and one's extensive capabilities, which makes it harder to progress.

I'm happy, as I'm working on things I wanted to do. When I was small, I thought working in advertising was interesting, could earn some money, and also be related to my personal interests. Now I can really work in this industry, so I'm happy about that. Also, I consider this job as training to learn more about film shooting, which I'd like to develop into.

### **Early Career Case 3: Phyllis Chan<sup>68</sup>**

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<sup>67</sup> Interviewed on 15 May 2017.

<sup>68</sup> Interviewed on 27 April 2017.

*Phyllis Chan graduated from the BA (Hons) in Creative Media of City University Hong Kong in 2012. Since graduation she's worked in a local company developing packaging.*

When I graduated from university, I wanted to find a visual arts-related job. I thought I'd be well prepared for the creative industries, however, I couldn't even get any interviews, no matter where I applied. Perhaps, it was because I was a fresh-grad or maybe because I didn't have any job experience? In the end, I settled for a non-visual arts job as I needed to survive. But most of my university classmates can't do what they wanted to do, most of them do something commercial rather than arts. Like them, I initially wanted to do something non-commercial, then I realised that the entire creative industries are all about "money" only. It's sad.

I'm a business development manager in a packaging company now; my daily duties include client communication, packaging design, production management, etc. The packaging industry is not very well known in Hong Kong, I hadn't even heard of it before joining this company. Now I've worked here for five years, but I'm still learning. I'm very satisfied with my salary, it can fully support my daily life. It would be difficult to find a visual arts' job with a satisfactory salary. My friends in the creative industries don't earn much, get lower pay raise, have higher workload and longer working hours... I always feel their efforts and incomes are not in balance. Work-life balance in the non-creative industries is more realistic.

When I started this job, I was like an empty piece of paper, I had no idea about e.g. how to work, communicate with colleagues, etc. The first two years were really hard. But after a few years, I accumulated more knowledge and experience and now I can actually contribute something to the company. Satisfaction with my work is much higher than before.

Today, I have nothing to do with visual arts practice anymore, we're like strangers. I may occasionally appreciate some art, but I no longer feel related. I'm a bit ashamed about that, because I like the arts, but my life just developed away from it. Anyway, I'm fine as it is. I can earn money, but I also get a sense of accomplishment and achievement through my work.

#### **Early Career Case 4: Cynthia Cho<sup>69</sup>**

*With a degree in Visual Arts of the Academy of Visual Arts in 2014, Cynthia Cho today works full-time at a flower boutique. Her job duties include administrative tasks, like e.g. communication with clients and headquarters, online order management and handling, etc. but also storefront work like the display of the merchandise, floral design, promotion activities, and more.*

I got interested in flowers while on a study trip to Canada. There I saw many people growing flowers in their backyards, which I thought was very attractive. Before that, I didn't have any connection to floral design at all. Then one day, I saw a floral delivery van on a street in Hong Kong, and I suddenly had the idea that I could learn floral design. However, it turned out floral design classes are very expensive, thus I instead looked for a job in a flower shop, to give me the opportunity to earn money while learning the skills. That was around two years ago, but I still want to learn more, so I'm now taking a recognised programme with City University of Hong Kong. After passing the final exam I will hold an international certificate in Floral Arrangement; I know some flower shops will offer a higher salary for recipients of this certification.

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<sup>69</sup> Interviewed on 9 May 2017.

Money is quite tight now, but my family hasn't given me much pressure so far. Both my parents' incomes are fine, thus I could find a job based on my interest, not for the income. Nonetheless, I need a higher income to be able to handle my various personal matters, especially the tuition fee for my further studies. Then again, in my industry the income of the marketing team is higher than that of the floral designer, who do the actual work. It's ironic really.

I've move quite far away from my creative practice today. I remember during my final year project in university, I felt quite overwhelmed; I seemed like I kept absorbing things, but there wasn't any space for release. After that period, I tried to close myself up to ever more outside influences. Maybe it's because of that that I got more distanced from the visual arts.

Generally, I'm satisfied with myself and physically well today. But sometimes I doubt that I can keep going on this career path, as the floral industry is very narrow, and I can't see much of a future for it. The job requires a lot of physical strength, and I'm worried whether my body can keep this up for 10 or 20 years. Besides, the appreciation of floral design in this society is limited, it's not a daily necessity. Most people only order flowers for important events and festivals and have rather stereotypic expectations. It's a bit discouraging, and I'm unsure about the prospects.

### **Early Career Case 5: Moon Li<sup>70</sup>**

*After graduation from the School of Communication of HKBU with a BSc in Digital Graphic Communication in 2013, Moon Li today works as a designer for an international branding agency in Hong Kong.*

The Digital Graphic Communication programme I studied was very practical, integrating various disciplines like graphic design, branding, etc. The course work we had to do were very related to the work I'm doing today. The whole career path was clear in the programme: to be a designer.

I believe high grades in university are a sign of one's competitiveness, people who want to be the best in their studies, will be more self-disciplined, be more aggressive. They'll be more passionate about their studies, put more effort into them, and be more confident in building their portfolio.

My first job was for a digital agency, my duties were mostly focused on the production stage than the current job. My current team is called the "creative department": a manager will give us some briefing, then we will work our creativity within those limitations. As my current position is somewhere between junior and senior, I need to handle multiple tasks, like web, printing, UIUX, etc. I'm therefore considering further education to improve my competitiveness in this career.

Living your creativity, I think, is a matter of attitude. With the right attitude, one may be creative within the limitations of any job. Apart from my full-time job, I occasionally also take on some freelance work, but I'm not sure whether that counts as creative practice? Generally, I feel quite removed from a personal practice today.

My income supports my living, the only problem is time. With a full-time job, it is difficult to continue a creative practice of my own. When I get home after a full day of work, I feel so tired... I think the work-life balance and income are fair, but sometimes there are still contradictions between the job and my

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<sup>70</sup> Interviewed on 2 May 2017.

expectations. I quite admire that some people choose their job for their interest, not for the salary. I'm still trying to work that out, the balance between dream job and salary.

### **Early Career Case 6: Paul Wong<sup>71</sup>**

*Paul Wong is a project coordinator at the School of Everyday Life, where he organises events, plans the curriculum, and takes on sundry duties. He started working there directly after his graduation from Polytechnic University School of Design's BA in Design in 2015.*

In 2014, I did an internship in commercial design, and I discovered that this was not what I wanted to do. I studied design as I wanted to help society, but in commercial design I couldn't do that. After the internship, I was about to do my final year project and prepare my portfolio to send to different design houses; I felt lost because I knew I didn't want to do that. I kept questioning myself about the purpose of studying design. One of my professors eventually suggested me to volunteer at the School of Everyday Life. I began to understand that the knowledge I have is a tool to be applied in whatever way I care for, not merely a means to get into the design industry. I felt the activities of the School of Everyday Life match with what I want to do, so I started work as a full-time staff there. Now, officially, my job duties include 30% design tasks. But I think design is broad, anything can be design.

I'm a frugal person, I don't need much; I also advocate environmental protection. My income is enough for me to live on, but of course not enough to buy a domestic property in Hong Kong. Initially, my parents worried about my career choice, but they stopped after they saw that I'm happy and willing to put in lots of hours.

When started working, I was not satisfied with my performance. Whatever I learnt at university were not the skills I needed at work. I had to overcome a lot of habits, e.g. in my communication and organisation skills. Work is so different from studying, you just can't learn the necessary skills in university. Maybe because fresh graduates don't have the experience to handle these obstacles, they feel so frustrated in the early years of their career. People are more satisfied with their work after more years, I think, because they get used to the working mode and skills, build up more networks, thus can be more relaxed in what they do.

I am very happy.

### **Early Career Case 7: Erica Wan<sup>72</sup>**

*Erica Wan graduated from Hong Kong Art School's BA in Fine Arts in 2014. Today, she works freelance on various projects while perusing an MFA at the School of Creative Media of City University Hong Kong. Some of her spare time she dedicates to her online platform [altermodernists.com](http://altermodernists.com), an alternative venue for promoting local visual arts.*

I started working when I was still in Art School. First, I had a part-time sales job for Time Out Hong Kong magazine, mainly responsible for selling advertisement. I could work from home office, thus I kept this job for more than four years until this year. More recently, I've been focusing on my master's degree. I'm in my

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<sup>71</sup> Interviewed on 21 April 2017.

<sup>72</sup> Interviewed on 11 May 2017.

second year in the MFA Creative Media programme. I've completed 70–80% of the formal classes, the rest of the time I will spend on my creative project. I do video art mainly.

Other than that, some classmates and I started a web platform called altermodernists.com when we were still in Art School. We publish interviews with local artists, do art tours etc. However, although this is still ongoing, we have less activity as most of us are busy with our jobs now.

During my time in Art School, I always felt I didn't have enough time to do artworks, despite I had a fairly flexible job schedule at the time. I was determined to focus on creative practice later. I realised the world is wide during my visual arts studies, thus afterwards I didn't want to go back to my life of before. Yet, I also felt I didn't have enough abilities to find a job in the creative field; merely being an artist is not enough for me. So, I decided to keep on studying.

My creative practice doesn't need a lot of money, I just need a computer and a camera. Some equipment I can borrow from school, thus I don't need to invest much at this moment. The income I have is enough to support myself, but it wouldn't be enough to support a family. Then again, I don't know whether it's because of studying visual arts, or because I'm getting older, but I feel that owning many things is simply redundant. I used to buy many things when I was younger, but don't do so now.

When I was in Art School, I produced my works by topics or because I had something to express. Today, my practice doesn't necessarily have a topic, I'd rather research new video techniques that other artists haven't used it before. I rarely consider selling my artworks – video art is difficult to sell – and I don't want to make turn my work into a design or a product. Instead, I use my other jobs to support my creative practice.

I'm much happier than before. Something has changed; maybe it's because of my change of focus? When I started studying in visual arts, I realised that I had been focusing on many really un-important things, thus now I pay attention only to things that make me happy. I do ask myself sometimes "Why make art?", but I keep doing it as it satisfies me.

### **Early Career Case 8: Bertie Chan<sup>73</sup>**

*Bertie Chan graduated from the Hong Kong Art School in 2013 with a BA in Fine Arts, concentration in Painting. At the time of the interview he has been working as a security guard for the IT department of a larger company for about one year, his third job after graduation.*

After graduating from Art School, I didn't want to work in art education as many others did. In my experience, many children are made to study art by their parents rather than by their own choice. I didn't want to get involved with that. Yet, as my family isn't rich, I needed a job immediately after graduation, so I found work as a courier for a delivery service. Sometime later, I wanted to get back into the visual arts, and could find a position as design assistant in fashion. However, without any background in fashion design that job didn't work out, and I moved on to my current position. It felt more down to earth, more stable. Today, I can generally afford my daily life, but of course there is still a lot of room for salary increases.

In regard of my creative practice, I don't do much anymore. I would spend more time on it if I could earn money through it, but as that isn't the case it could only be a hobby. When I'm in the mood, I still draw in my

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<sup>73</sup> Interviewed on 28 April 2017.

spare time, but I don't feel like dedicating much time or effort at this point. Besides, I don't rent a studio, which additionally limits my practice, as I may only work at home. As I just moved to a new house recently, I'm still not quite settled down, but I need a stable mood to keep going on with my art.

When I was still at school, I had quite some ambitions, maybe a higher position, be someone. But it's not easy, you need to be assertive, and I'm not that kind of person. I depend on my mood, I don't do well with pressure, thus today visual arts are just like a friend to me, not a means for a career; a complicated friend, who's difficult to understand, despite I've studied her for some time.

I believe income opportunities in non-creative professions on average are higher than in the creative fields, but there are probably exceptions. I know some people were approached by galleries after graduation, I assume their income probably compares well also with non-creative positions. Yet, in general it is easier to achieve high in non-creative jobs. But it also requires a different mind-set: people working in non-creative fields usually have a goal, but creative people often have no idea about what they are trying to achieve.

I had a lot of passion before I graduated, I thought my paintings were good; now I realise the world is big, and my work is actually not that outstanding. Nonetheless, I'm happier now than I was before. I believe work satisfaction and income are related, but income is not the only criterion; work environment and colleagues are also important.

### **Advanced Career Case 1: Calvin Chung<sup>74</sup>**

*Calvin Chung works full-time in the Alumni Affairs Office of the Chinese University Hong Kong from where he received his degree in Fine Arts in 2009. In his spare time, he follows his passion as a freelance magician.*

In my current day job, I promote good relations between the university and its alumni, by organising various reunion activities, and to encouraging alumni to contribute to the university in various capacities. When I was still a student, I helped the university college to do some design work, and eventually the officer asked me to continue working here after graduation. Initially, I mainly helped with various design tasks and publications, but after a few years, I became an administrator due to the promotion system of the university.

I've been working here for six years, after a year of working holiday in Australia. I still sometimes make some extra money as a freelance magician, but I don't think it would work as a full-time career in Hong Kong. Anyway, as it is, I earn enough to sustain my living, but I can't save up much or even buy a property. Therefore, the staff dormitory provided by the university is one of the main reasons why I keep working here.

Unfortunately, many people in Hong Kong think arts & crafts ought to be cheap, especially when the works don't come from a gallery or museum. Even visual arts teachers get lower income than those in other subjects. This society doesn't care much about visual arts, thus the lower pay in the creative industries. On the other hand, in the visual arts the emphasis on reputation is very high; people with high standing can sell their work at very expensive prices. But even for those, clients will continuously try to negotiate prices as the arrival at the prices isn't very transparent.

As a magician, my creative practice today leans towards the performing arts, which developed from my medium of choice during university: installation. My artworks tended to interact with the audience, and

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<sup>74</sup> Interviewed on 13 May 2017.

eventually I applied the same methodologies also to my passion: magic. I think, visual arts changed my way of thinking: as a visual artist, you must be creative in your art making, but that isn't as common in the magic field. Many magicians prefer to merely follow traditions, without many innovations; yet I want my magic to be new.

When I look back over the past seven years, I feel good; I've achieved many things, in particular some big magic projects with friends, including some awards too. However, I can't feel entirely happy, because my full-time job uses up most of my time, thus I can't put more time into magic. Still, I'd say my work satisfaction is above average. If I could make the same money through magic, I'd certainly choose magic. But, as it is, I'm satisfied that my salary can sustain my passion.

### **Advanced Career Case 2: Rick Cheng<sup>75</sup>**

*Rick Cheng graduated from the BA (Hons) in Visual Arts of the Academy of Visual Arts in 2009. Today he has a position as a full-time Visual Arts teacher at the HKICC Lee Shau Kee School of Creativity (HKSC), a local secondary school. He also sits on the board and curatorial panel of 1a space, one of Hong Kong's longest established not-for-profit art spaces for which he curates exhibitions and supports in operations.*

After graduation, I tried different jobs, mostly in the education field: I was a gallery assistant at 1a space, a teaching assistant and later project assistant at HKBU, a part-time design teacher at HKSC and at the Community College of Lingnan University, a wall painter in Ocean Park, etc. Eventually, I got my current position.

Already during my studies, I was determined to explore visual art education as my professional career, as I felt myself to be suited for educational work, and I wanted to further study myself in the long term. My work now matches my requirements: I can save money, and also teach across a variety of areas. I don't like to traditional modes of teaching in typical Hong Kong schools, as they don't support teaching outside the box. Thus, so far, I feel HKSC allows me to do what I want to do.

My salary is okay for living, but what is "okay" in the context Hong Kong, when income isn't enough to rent, let alone to buy a home? My income is pretty high compared to my university classmates, but I'm underpaid compared to the teachers other than at HKSC. Nonetheless, my income so far could always support my creative practice; I was even able to setup a studio together with classmates after graduation. I don't rent a studio today anymore as my practice in installation doesn't really require a space. Instead, I save the money for future exhibitions or further studies.

Luckily, my family doesn't give me much pressure about my economic situation or my work. Pressure usually comes from the outside: people keep talking about investments in stocks and property, but my concept of "investment" is about further studies and improving my knowledge.

Visual Arts to me are about values. I understood during my own studies that technical skills are not of such importance, yet the vision, the attitude towards the subject is what counts. Gradually, I built up these values and views through my various exhibitions and projects, and that's what I want to convey to my students today.

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<sup>75</sup> Interviewed on 25 April 2017.

I don't think of visual arts as a "job", it should rather be considered a "career". A career is entrepreneurial, something that initially requires investment, before producing returns. When you start up a business, you don't expect to earn a lot of money in the early years. In my view, the income in this industry is not particularly low, but many people don't operate with a long-term perspective, thus they are disappointed.

I'm happy with my life so far. I know many of my university classmates are not involved with the visual arts anymore, but I can still enjoy exposure to the field. Most importantly, I feel my energy for the arts is still there, possibly has even grown as my insights have deepened. My enthusiasm wasn't thwarted by time, I'm still experimenting, renewing my views; I'm really happy about that.

### **Advanced Career Case 3: Joey Cheuk<sup>76</sup>**

*A graduate of the second cohort of the BA (Hons) in Visual Arts of the Academy of Visual Arts, HKBU in 2009, Joey Cheuk today works full time for the M+ Rover, a section of the museum's education and public outreach programme. She oversees the operation this mobile exhibition truck including art set up, technical support, communication with artists, planning of manpower etc.*

"I don't want to wear a dress to work." was my only concern when I chose my subject stream in secondary school. I always wanted to live comfortably, so I chose the Arts stream instead of the other option Commerce. Further than that, I didn't plan much, I just followed the opportunities that presented themselves to me. I've worked in Visual Arts related-positions ever since graduation, mostly as project coordinator in different organisations. I chose my jobs always by the conditions offered, and didn't consider whether it was in Visual Arts or not. Today, I'm glad I didn't study the Commerce stream. I may not have a great income, but I'm comfortable with my life and the people around me. I appreciate that.

My economic situation is generally not bad. I may not be entirely satisfied with my income – everyone always wants more – but what I have is enough for my needs. Sometimes, when I compare my job content and income to those in non-Visual Arts jobs I may feel a bit envious; but I realise the creative industries will always be in a difficult spot in an economy-driven society. Visual arts aren't considered to have much economic value. Most people in Hong Kong wouldn't think they should pay for visual arts. Therefore, people working creatively will inevitably have a low income; they'll have to make up for that through satisfaction in their work.

My parents both are teachers, their incomes are not bad, thus I don't have a lot of economic pressure. Otherwise, I wouldn't have had time to spend on personal development. If I didn't have this support, I probably would've had to find a job with higher income and sustain my live first, develop my hobbies afterward. Because my family could support me, I could be capricious, and I'm very grateful for that. They never complained or worried about my career choice.

Practice in the visual arts is a hobby to me these days, something I enjoy in my spare time. I may not be actively involved with any art making projects, but it is still something I want to continuously learn more about. My education at secondary and university-level changed my personal views, and now I want to share that with a wider audience.

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<sup>76</sup> Interviewed on 21 April 2017.



In terms of happiness I would give myself 75 out of 100 marks. It'd be unfair to claim I was unhappy, as I'm self-sufficient, can live and work in dignity; compared to many people in my professional area, I'm doing rather well. The only thing bugging me a little are looming questions about my future career path.

#### **Established Career Case 4: Alice Chan<sup>77</sup>**

*Alice Chan graduated from Chinese University's BA (Hons) in Fine Arts programme in 2005. Today, she works as a missionary for her evangelical church, while continuing her studies in Theology at a seminary.*

Already before I graduated from university, I was working as a part-time art tutor in a drawing studio. The boss was nice, and I also agreed with her teaching concepts, thus it came naturally to work there full-time after graduation. I stayed for about six years, as I felt I could change people's lives there, and I collaborated well with my boss.

But then I felt the need to change; I experienced God's love so deeply... I picked up studies in Theology, which took up about four years, during which I went on exchanges and participated in cultural research projects. Finally, I became a church missionary, until now.

At the beginning, I thought it was a career change when switching to missionary work, but looking back, I think it was an integration of religion and visual arts. My job incorporates elements of visual arts, e.g. when I handle administration, promotion, etc. Despite they may not be actual works of art, I feel they're an alternative way to express creativity. Many instances allow for creativity, be it communication with people, annual planning, or even Bible teaching, they may need drama, music, drawings to help the practice. I think this is a kind of creative practice.

Today my economic situation is very good, as good as always, though indeed my income now is higher than it was before. Maybe it's because the art scene in Hong Kong is small, people appreciate and buy artworks only if the artists put in a lot of effort, or their works are very out-standing. In any case, the creative industries are not mainstream in Hong Kong, thus it could be expected that the income is higher in non-creative industries. Anyway, I think income is merely a necessity to maintain a living; sometimes some extra money can make life easier – for example, having a good lunch, doing something you enjoy. Of course, it's good to have extra money, but it's not a requirement. Income isn't the most important criterion for a job. As work occupies most of the time in a day, it's a waste of time if it's not your mission, even if you did get a high income.

I'm not a person who couldn't live without art, but it seems like it has simply assimilated into my living. I believe visual arts graduates need to know what they want. Then, even if not working in the creative industries, they can still find ways to make efforts, and find satisfaction over time. At least, I'm happy.

#### **Established Career Case 1: Lena Wan<sup>78</sup>**

*Lena Wan graduated from the BSc in Digital Graphic Communication of HKBU in 2002. She joined her current company, a property agency, a decade ago. Today she works there as a product analyst and is mainly responsible for the user experience (UX) design of her company's online identity.*

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<sup>77</sup> Interviewed on 11 May 2017.

<sup>78</sup> Interviewed on 11 May 2017.

My job has two parts: on the one hand, I do User Interface (UI) design, which is concerned with balancing our online graphic communication with the company's culture & identity. On the other hand, I do User Experience design (UX). Through monitoring various data – page views, click rates – we try to understand the clients' experience of our products, then we suggest some enhancements and analyse the work performance of the edited items.

I came to this company by coincidence just after I graduated, but originally not as a UX designer; there wasn't such thing as UX design then. After I worked as UX designer for the Hong Kong Jockey Club, then I returned to this company until now. I think I earn good enough now; for a normal life, I think, it's fine.

I don't think my work today is creative practice as it's very data-driven and analytical. Very much like customer service, it doesn't leave much room for creativity, not like a design agency. I'm serving the clients and manage their expectations. But frankly, I don't care whether I be creative or not, I prefer analysis today. Looking back to the time I just graduated, I wanted to do something special then, but gradually that became less important. Maybe it helps that sometimes I may still apply or suggest some creative thinking in some tricky situations.

Compared to an agency or production house, it's harder to develop creativity at an in-house design department. On the other hand, in design agencies it's harder balance work and life with all the over-time and low income. I couldn't work in that industry anymore as now I have children to take care of. I'm quite happy with my personal life, but less satisfied with my career, as I can't really do what I like. I just do what the company needs, anything too advanced or beautiful won't be accepted.

In my experience, the starting salary in the creative industries is lower than in other areas. However, in later career stages income depends much on personal efforts, ambition, and strategic job changes. I have many friends with high income also in the creative industries. It's a struggle in the first few years, but you will find your way. When I first graduated, my expectations didn't match with reality, but I began to understand the rules of the game after a few years. Most people should probably be able to find a lasting preoccupation and know what they want about eight years after university.