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Artist Unemployment Rates for 2008 and 2009
An Addendum to NEA Research Note #97,
[Artists in a Year of Recession: Impact on Jobs in 2008](#)

“Why this is hell, nor am I out of it.”
Christopher Marlowe

In March 2009, the NEA’s Office of Research & Analysis reported data confirming that artists, like other workers, had sustained heavy job losses in the first full year of the economic recession. As a group, artists were unemployed at a rate nearly identical to that of all workers (6 percent of artists and other workers alike). From December 2007 to December 2008, moreover, unemployment rose faster for artists than for the total civilian workforce.

In the second year of the recession, artists’ unemployment rate (9.5%) overtook that of all civilian workers (8.6%). Also, in 2008 and 2009, artists left the workforce at a higher rate than other workers in general. In many cases, they likely did so because of the discouraging job market for artists. Among all artists, architects may have been disproportionately affected because of ties to the struggling construction sector, although many performing artists also showed high levels of unemployment. A summary analysis and charts are provided below.

1. As the recession deepened, unemployment among artists soared.

- In 2009, the average unemployment rate for all artists climbed to 9.5 percent, far surpassing the percentage unemployed among all professionals (4.4 percent), a broad category of workers that includes not only artists, but other occupations that generally require college training.
- 29,000 workers left the artist labor force between 2008 and 2009.
- Many of those workers likely were discouraged about finding jobs as artists.

2. Although artist unemployment rates usually mirror those reported for all civilian workers, the recession appears to have hit artists harder.

- Between 2008 and 2009, the artist unemployment rate rose by 4.3 percentage points—a full point higher than the increase to the civilian unemployment rate over the two-year recessionary period.

3. Architects and designers especially have been affected.

- In 2009, the unemployment rate for architects reached 10.8 percent—up from 3.6 percent in 2008 and 0.8 percent in 2006, approximately one year before the recession began.
- Designers’ unemployment rate hit 9.7 percent—5.5 percentage points greater than in 2008.
- Between 2008 and 2009, 13,000 workers left the labor market as architects.
- Over the same period, the artist labor force lost 23,000 designers.

4. Greater unemployment among architects and designers likely reflects contractions in the construction industry.

- In just two months (November and December 2009) the construction industry shed 11,500 jobs.¹

- In 2008, the construction industry’s “value added” to the gross domestic product (i.e., the amount construction contributed to the economy) fell by 5.6 percent. That year, construction as a share of GDP fell to its lowest level since 1997.²

5. Unemployment rates for actors tend to be the highest among all artist occupations.

- During the fourth quarter of 2009, more than half of all actors were unemployed.
- For the entire year, the actor unemployment rate averaged 36.8 percent.

6. Other artists with comparatively high unemployment rates include dancers, writers and authors, and photographers.

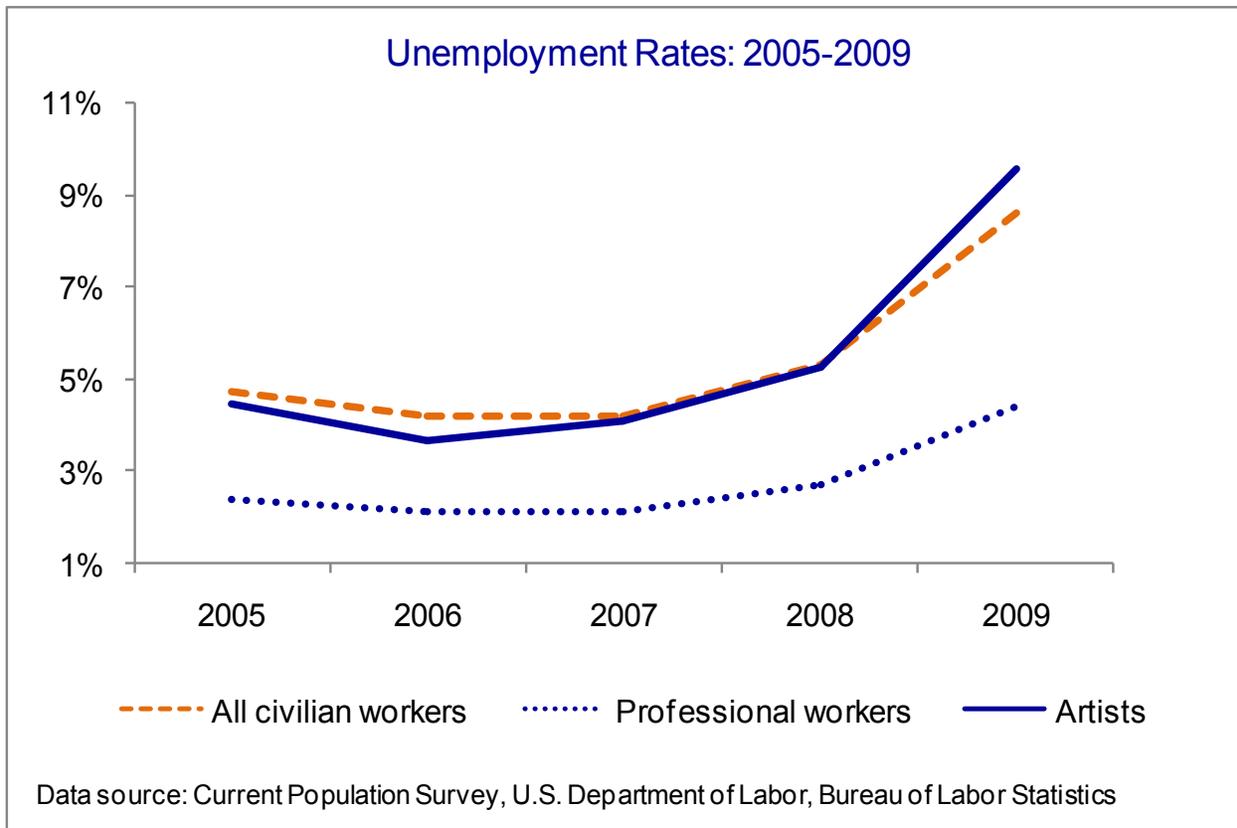
- One in five dancers was unemployed in 2009.
- That year, the unemployment rate averaged 7.9 percent (10 percent during the fourth quarter) for writers and authors.
- It was 8.1 percent for photographers.

7. Because unemployment generally lags the economy, unemployment rates for artists and other workers may remain high or even rise as the GDP starts to recover. Still, some leading economic indicators suggest a crack in the ice.

- Corporate profits increased by 10.8 percent in the third quarter of 2009; this gain followed increases of 3.7 percent and 5.3 percent in the first and second quarters, respectively.³
- Personal consumption spending (adjusted for inflation) increased by 2.8 percent in the third quarter of 2009.⁴

8. Recent gains in “fixed residential investment” (i.e., spending on single-family and multi-family homes) may boost employment conditions for architects and designers working in the construction industry.

- Fixed residential investment rose by 18.9 percent in the third quarter of 2009.⁵



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Endnotes

¹ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Table 2. Detailed Industry Employment Ranked by Change Between November and December 2009, from

<ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/suppl/empsit.tab2.txt>

² Kim, D., Lindberg, B., & Monaldo, J. Annual Industry Accounts: Advance Statistics on GDP by Industry for 2008. *Survey of Current Business*, May 2009.

³ Swann, C. GDP and the Economy: Third Estimates for the Third Quarter of 2009. *Survey of Current Business*, January 2010.

⁴ Bureau of Economic Analysis, U.S. Department of Commerce. National Income and Products Accounts Table (2.3.1). Revised December 22, 2009, from

<http://www.bea.gov/national/nipaweb/index.asp>

⁵ Bureau of Economic Analysis, U.S. Department of Commerce. National Income and Products Accounts Table (1.1.1), Revised December 22, 2009, from

<http://www.bea.gov/national/nipaweb/index.asp>

The Artist Labor Force: Trends in Employment and Unemployment: 2005-2009

(Numbers in thousands)

Occupation	Annual					Q4 2009	Change	
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009		2008-2009	2005-2009
Total civilian workers, 16 years and over	148,655	150,811	152,497	153,520	153,106	152,188	-414	4,451
Employed	141,730	144,427	146,047	145,362	139,877	138,724	-5,485	-1,853
Unemployed ¹	6,925	6,384	6,450	8,158	13,229	13,464	5,071	6,304
Unemployment rate	4.7%	4.2%	4.2%	5.3%	8.6%	8.8%	3.3	3.9
Professional occupations	29,503	29,825	30,872	31,546	32,117	32,792	571	2,614
Employed	28,795	29,187	30,210	30,702	30,690	31,438	-12	1,895
Unemployed	708	638	662	844	1,427	1,354	583	719
Unemployment rate	2.4%	2.1%	2.1%	2.7%	4.4%	4.1%	1.7	2.0
All artist occupations	2,164	2,141	2,227	2,240	2,211	2,226	-29	47
Employed	2,068	2,063	2,136	2,122	2,000	2,037	-122	-68
Unemployed	96	78	91	118	211	189	93	115
Unemployment rate ²	4.4%	3.6%	4.1%	5.3%	9.5%	8.5%	4.3	5.1
Architects	239	223	243	242	229	218	-13	-10
Employed	235	221	240	233	204	196	-29	-31
Unemployed	4	2	3	9	25	22	16	21
Unemployment rate	1.7%	0.8%	1.2%	3.6%	10.8%	10.1%	7.2	9.1
Art directors, fine artists, and animators ³	245	233	238	226	225	224	-1	-20
Employed	234	223	227	213	213	202	0	-21
Unemployed	11	10	11	13	12	22	-1	1
Unemployment rate	4.5%	4.1%	4.5%	5.7%	5.3%	9.9%	-0.4	0.8
Designers ⁴	803	842	876	870	847	862	-23	44
Employed	774	821	852	834	764	812	-70	-10
Unemployed	29	21	24	36	83	50	47	54
Unemployment rate	3.6%	2.5%	2.8%	4.2%	9.7%	5.9%	5.5	6.1
Actors ⁵	55	49	37	44	41	49	-3	-14
Employed	41	38	28	30	26	22	-4	-15
Unemployed	14	11	9	14	15	27	1	1
Unemployment rate	25.5%	22.5%	23.5%	32.2%	36.8%	54.8%	4.6	11.3
Producers and directors	129	141	159	159	151	156	-8	22
Employed	124	134	149	154	138	152	-16	14
Unemployed	5	7	10	5	13	4	8	8
Unemployment rate	3.7%	5.2%	6.4%	3.3%	8.5%	2.5%	5.2	4.8
Dancers and choreographers ⁵	35	31	28	28	23	28	-5	-12
Employed	31	28	25	25	18	22	-7	-13
Unemployed	4	3	3	3	5	6	2	1
Unemployment rate	10.4%	9.7%	11.0%	10.9%	20.8%	21.1%	9.9	10.4

The Artist Labor Force: Trends in Employment and Unemployment, 2005-2009

Continued

Occupation	Annual					Q4 2009	Change	
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009		2008-2009	2005-2009
Musicians and singers	223	213	179	195	182	189	-13	-41
Employed	213	203	170	186	168	177	-18	-45
Unemployed	10	10	9	9	14	12	5	4
Unemployment rate	4.6%	4.8%	5.1%	4.5%	7.6%	6.2%	3.1	3.0
Announcers ¹	63	64	56	42	58	54	16	-5
Employed	61	62	51	41	52	52	11	-9
Unemployed	2	2	5	1	6	2	5	4
Unemployment rate	3.6%	3.6%	9.3%	2.9%	10.0%	3.8%	7.1	6.4
Writers and authors ⁶	185	180	187	199	193	210	-6	8
Employed	178	174	179	186	178	189	-8	0
Unemployed	7	6	8	13	15	21	2	8
Unemployment rate	4.0%	3.4%	4.5%	6.4%	7.9%	10.0%	1.5	3.9
Photographers	158	133	180	191	205	179	14	47
Employed	150	127	173	181	188	164	7	38
Unemployed	8	6	7	10	17	15	7	9
Unemployment rate	4.8%	4.3%	3.8%	5.1%	8.1%	8.2%	3.0	3.3
Other entertainers and performers	29	32	44	44	57	57	13	28
Employed	27	32	42	39	51	49	12	24
Unemployed	2	0	2	5	6	8	1	4
Unemployment rate	6.7%	1.0%	5.4%	10.5%	10.3%	14.6%	-0.2	3.6

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Source: Published and unpublished data from the Current Population Survey,
U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The BLS does not publish data for occupations with employment levels below 50,000.

¹ Unemployed within occupational categories is measured as experienced unemployed, i.e., unemployed people who have worked at any time in the past. This number differs from other BLS estimates of total U.S. unemployment because it excludes new entrants to the labor market.

² All unemployment rates shown, except the category "all artist occupations," were calculated by the BLS using unrounded data.

³ Defined as art directors, fine artists (i.e., painters, sculptors, and illustrators), multimedia artists, and animators. The BLS labels this category "artists and related workers."

⁴ Defined as commercial and industrial designers, fashion designers, floral designers, graphic designers, interior designers, visual merchandisers (e.g., window dressers), and set and exhibit designers.

⁵ Year-over-year changes may be insignificant due to small sample sizes.

⁶ Defined as workers who originate and prepare written material, such as scripts, stories, advertisements, and other material.