

Visual Artist

You make paintings, sculpture, photographs or installations and sell them through galleries, commissions and grants.

TYPICAL PAY

\$62,000

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$39k to \$94k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

up to 4 years

after high school

DEMAND

Limited

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Home and rented studios, galleries, artist-run centres, public art sites

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 10 to 12
Visual arts, and make work outside class. Enter juried student shows. Keep everything photographed.
- 2 Art school, or not** 0 to 4 years
A Bachelor of Fine Arts at a place like OCAD University (Ontario College of Art and Design), Emily Carr University of Art and Design, NSCAD University (Nova Scotia College of Art and Design) or Concordia University. Or a college studio diploma. Or neither.
- 3 First shows** While in school and after
Group shows at artist-run centres, cafes, small commercial galleries. This is how a record starts.
- 4 First grants** 1 to 5 years out
Provincial arts councils usually have an emerging artist stream with lower requirements than the federal one. Apply, get rejected, apply again.
- 5 Gallery representation** 3 to 10 years out
A commercial gallery takes you on, or you keep selling directly and applying for commissions. Both are real careers.

Pros and cons

- + You decide what you make and nobody can take that away
- + No licence, no gatekeeper, no set starting age
- + Public funding for individual artists genuinely exists in Canada
- Income is low and unpredictable, especially in the first decade
- Most artists need a second job for years, and many forever
- Rejection is constant: grants, juries and galleries all say no far more than yes

Optional boosts

Grant writing. Fabrication skills. Residencies. A Master of Fine Arts.

Good to know

Canada pays artists to exhibit

Since the 1960s Canadian public galleries have generally paid artists a fee simply to show work, following a schedule negotiated by artists' associations. That is not standard in every country.

It is a small workforce

Job Bank counted about 17,100 people employed as visual artists in Canada in 2023, and rates the 3-year outlook as undetermined nearly everywhere because the numbers are too small to measure.

Where these numbers come from

Job Bank: Artist, visual arts in Canada, wages (updated November 2025)

Job Bank: Artist, visual arts in Canada, job outlook

CARFAC (Canadian Artists' Representation)

Canada Council for the Arts

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in Canadian dollars, based on Government of Canada Job Bank wage data and published salary grids. They vary by province, employer and experience. Tuition is for domestic students. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/ca/careers/visual-artist>



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