

Women in arts and culture – Artists, not muses

As in all other domains, women's place in arts and culture has not matched their ambitions and skills. Traditionally they were muses of male artists or amateur performing artists, and arts education for them was very limited. Despite good progress, there is still a lot to do to ensure women fully and freely contribute their artistic vision, hold positions of responsibility, and to recover the works of courageous women artists from the dusty archives of museums.

Bittersweet past

Traditional roles attributed to women overwhelmingly limited their contribution in culture and arts to inspirational muses of famous artists, or crafts such as embroidery. At best, they were performing artists, mostly in the domestic sphere: singing or playing an instrument, most often the piano.

Fortunately, history offers an insight into periods when women practiced their art on an equal footing with men. In the past ten to fifteen years, research in museum archives and cellars has accelerated and revealed hidden treasures of artworks produced by female artists. Sadly, some of these works were originally attributed to men, thus breaching the artists' moral rights to have their work attributed to their names. This behaviour questioned their rich creativity and courage in not complying with the role society imposed on them. Women's works account for only [3-5 %](#) of permanent art collections across Europe and the United States.

The [Renaissance](#) offers a positive example of women painters who fought to be recognised as artists, and some developed new techniques or were even more successful than men. However, in the nineteenth century, they could train only as portrait painters, in women-only schools offering a reduced curriculum, which excluded painting nudes, hence excluding them from the more noble genre of history painting.

Women musicians experienced a similar situation, being recognised as fine pianists and singers, as well as teachers. However, their path to composing was difficult and often limited to piano or voice works.

Change of paradigm

The women's emancipation movement brought a change, opened possibilities for women to train, educate and work in every domain in which they might be interested. Nevertheless, many domains are still considered a male prerogative, such as [orchestra conducting](#), an example of a leadership role. Women's career and artistic accomplishment in this challenging domain is full of obstacles.

At the same time, the place of women in twentieth century [art history](#) was erased, even though some of them were pioneers in new art forms. Very few people know that [Alice Guy Blaché](#) was the first to explore the possibilities offered by film technology, produce films and set up a film studio. Unfortunately, as in so many cases, some of her works were attributed to men (often by the latter) and the remainder forgotten and anonymous in archives.

This achievement of women's emancipation needs to be supported by stories of successful women from the past to the present day. Women need to be brought [back into art history](#), most often written by men and male art critics. Their courage and curiosity in experimenting with new technology or forms of expression need to be recognised, and their life and work recognised as role models for girls.

Weak position in precarious sectors

Women's contributions have been disregarded in virtually every domain of activity. At the same time, those considered as typically female have been deemed unimportant. The pay gap can reach [30 %](#) for women musicians in Europe. Among the 10 % of those working in the field of art and culture with [lowest income](#) in France, 57 % are women, while they account for 27 % of the 1 % with the highest revenues. The '#metoo' movement has spared no arts domain. Women have been victims of [sexual harassment](#) and abuse, be it in top fashion brands, photography, classical music, theatre and even prestigious cultural institutions, and by

famous artists. The traditional understanding of family relationships and women's roles, and combining these various roles, has complicated women's paths to success, and resulted in non-linear careers.

Arts and culture present additional difficulties. The sector in itself offers a very unstable and [precarious](#) working environment with a high rate of self-employment and contractual work, while requiring high qualifications. While 34 % of people in the EU economy have tertiary education, they account for almost 60 % in the cultural and creative sectors.

While men account for 53 % of the cultural and creative sectors' workforce (see Figure 1) more men than women enjoy professional stability and have a full-time job (14 percentage points more) in cultural and creative sectors. More women than men study arts (with a 20 percentage point difference) and they are more involved in arts activities, on both a weekly and monthly basis (see Figure 2). These numbers show huge progress as regards arts studies by women but their professional status is still lower than that of men.

The disparities in professional position between women and men, and the perception of their capacities, skills and artistic vision, translate into the number of women in arts leadership positions and [award recipients](#). There are no EU-level data on the subject, but a 2017 [study](#) offers an insight for seven countries. The situation varies according to Member State and sector – gaps do persist, due to stereotypes about management styles, even if sometimes more women than men occupy arts leadership positions or dominate as award winners.

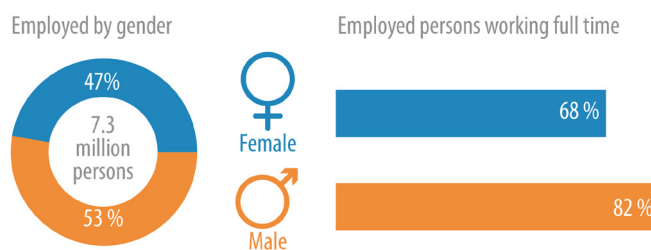
EU action – Scope limited to support

Women artists and cultural workers have made their voices heard at the EU level too. Council conclusions on the [work plan for culture 2019-2022](#) adopted in December 2018 list gender equality as a pillar of cultural diversity among its five priorities. The document points to the need for comprehensive data and exchange of good practices to propose adequate policies and measures. A mapping exercise will help examine the situation of women in the cultural and creative sectors (CCS), identify obstacles, and define objectives and actions. The German [Presidency conclusions](#) of November 2020 on gender equality in culture pointed to risks resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, and the potential of recovery measures to foster gender equality in the CCS, especially considering the gender gap in unpaid care work which has been a particular challenge during the pandemic.

A May 2018 communication by the Commission, [A new European agenda for culture](#), mentioned gender issues as a specific action for social inclusion through culture, and pointed to the need for equal project management of the Creative Europe programme. In 2019, the Commission initiated its stakeholder dialogue '[Voices of Culture](#)' on the subject, an expert group (working under the [open method of coordination](#)), to suggest policy recommendations. It also included gender balance issues among non-discrimination eligibility criteria in the proposal for a regulation on the [Creative Europe](#) programme 2021-2027. A [study on gender gaps](#) funded from the Creative Europe programme contributed initial insights.

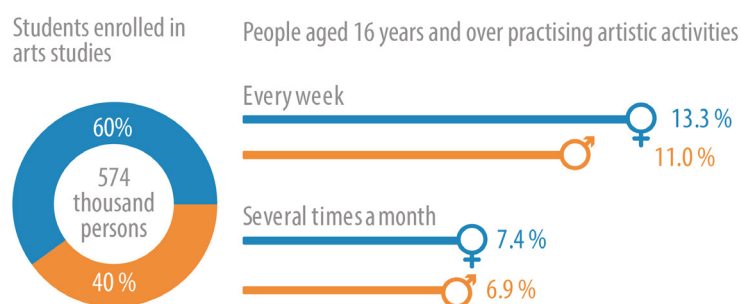
In its [resolution](#) on the Creative Europe programme 2021-2027 of March 2019, the European Parliament was concerned about all aspects of gender. It introduced gender balance indicators in CCS and the programme.

Figure 1 – Cultural employment, EU-27, 2018, %



Data source: Eurostat, [Employment](#); [Full time](#).

Figure 2 – Arts studies and amateur practice, EU-27, %



Data source: Eurostat, [Arts practice](#); [Arts students](#).

