THE U.S. ARTS ECONOMY IN 2021:
A NATIONAL SUMMARY BRIEF

This research brief reports data from the U.S. Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account (ACPSA), a product of the National Endowment for the Arts and the Bureau of Economic Analysis.

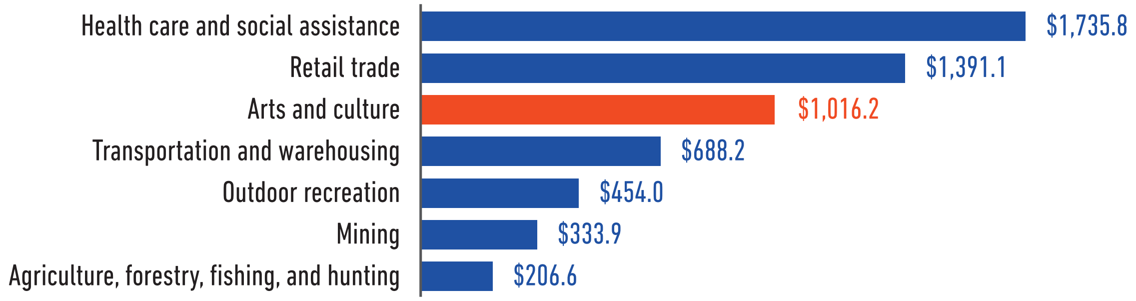
Covering the full year of 2021, the new dataset shows a sharp rebound for most of the largest arts and cultural industries after the disastrous first year of COVID-19 in the U.S. Between 2020 and 2021, the arts economy grew by 13.7 percent in inflation-adjusted dollars. This year-over-year rate increase far surpassed that for the entire U.S. economy (+5.9 percent).

Despite economic progress, some core arts industries have yet to reach their pre-pandemic levels. This is true of independent artists (as an industry), performing arts organizations, and arts-related construction, among others. When it comes to employment, in particular, the majority of arts and cultural industries (23 out of 35) have not returned to 2019 levels. All the same, the sector as a whole contributed more than $1 trillion to U.S. GDP in 2021, a new high-water mark.

1. **In 2021, the arts contributed 4.4 percent of GDP**, or just over $1.0 trillion, to the U.S. economy.
   - As in previous years, the arts added more to U.S. GDP than did any of these sectors: agriculture/forestry/fishing; mining; outdoor recreation; and transportation and warehousing.
   - The total economic value added by arts and cultural industries rose by 13.7 percent between 2020 and 2021—a record year of expansion for the sector. The overall U.S. economy grew by 5.9 percent in the same timeframe.

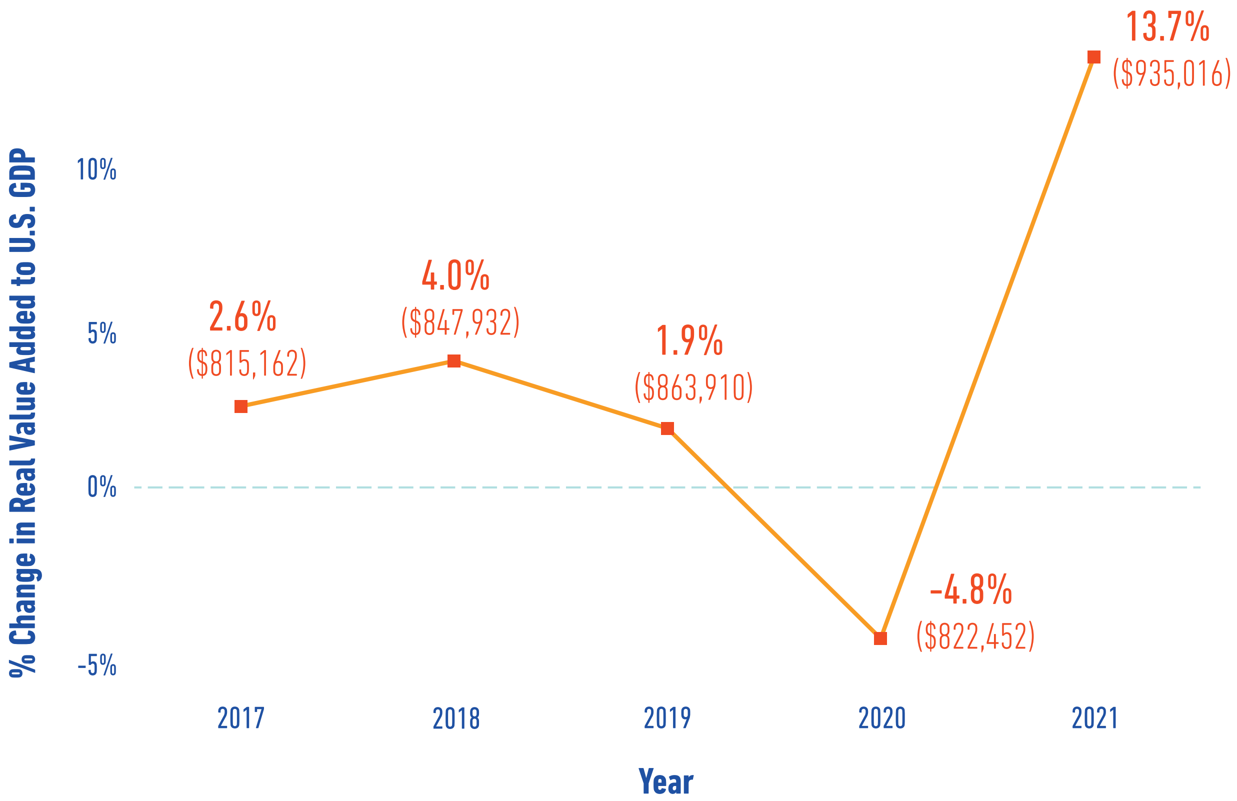
Value added to U.S. GDP by selected sectors: 2021

(in billions)



Year-over-year changes in the arts as a percentage of U.S. GDP (2017-2021)

(inflation-adjusted dollars, in millions)



2. **In 2021, most arts and cultural industries were restored to pre-pandemic levels of economic activity**—or exceeded those levels entirely. In total, 22 out of 35 arts industries posted amounts surpassing both 2019 and 2020 levels.

   - In inflation-adjusted dollars, the value added to GDP by web *publishing and streaming services* (now the largest arts and cultural industry in the U.S.) grew by 27.3 percent, from $134.6 billion in 2020 to $171.3 billion in 2021. It was also the only arts industry to experience significant growth in 2020—up from $128.0 billion in 2019.

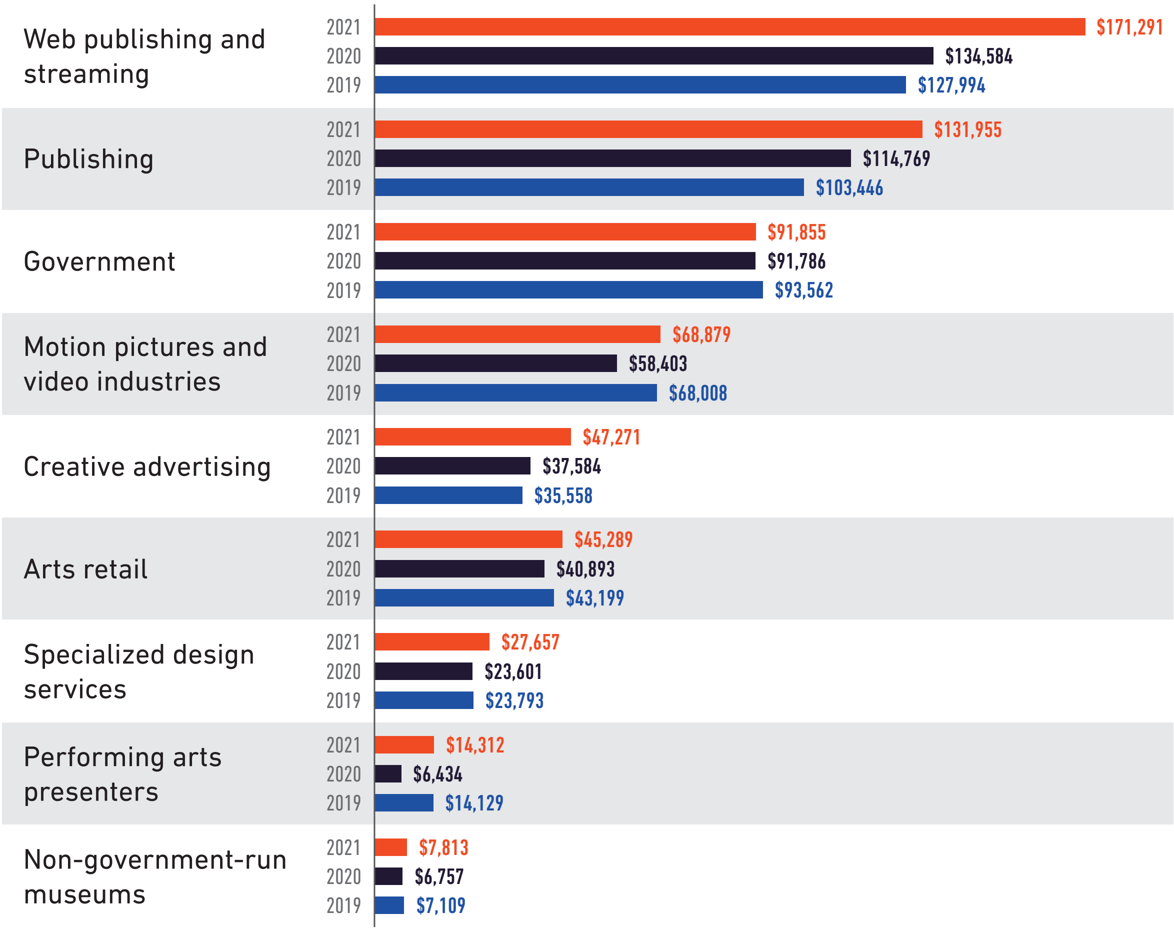
   - The value added by *traditional and software publishing* ($132.0 billion in 2021) also grew—albeit modestly—for the second consecutive year of the pandemic. Among other arts industries that had greater economic activity than in 2019 or 2020 were: *arts retail; creative advertising; specialized design services*; and non-government-run *museums*.

   - *Government*'s value to the arts economy has remained largely stable since the outbreak of COVID-19 ($93.6 billion in 2019, and just below $92.0 billion in both 2020 and 2021).

   - The value added by the *motion picture industry* is back to the pre-pandemic (2019) level: nearly $68.9 billion in 2021, after a 14 percent dip in 2020. *Performing arts presenters*, meanwhile, contributed just over $14.3 billion to the economy (a 122 percent rise from 2020), bringing the industry slightly over the 2019 level.

Changes in value added by select arts and cultural industries (2019-2021)

(inflation-adjusted dollars, in millions)



3. **Other arts industries also saw economic gains in 2021, but not enough to equal 2019 levels.** A total of ten arts industries fell into this category.

   - In 2021, the value added by *independent writers, artists, and performers*—considered as an industry—grew to $33.5 billion, up from $28.9 billion, after adjusting for inflation. This amount is 18 percent less than in 2019.

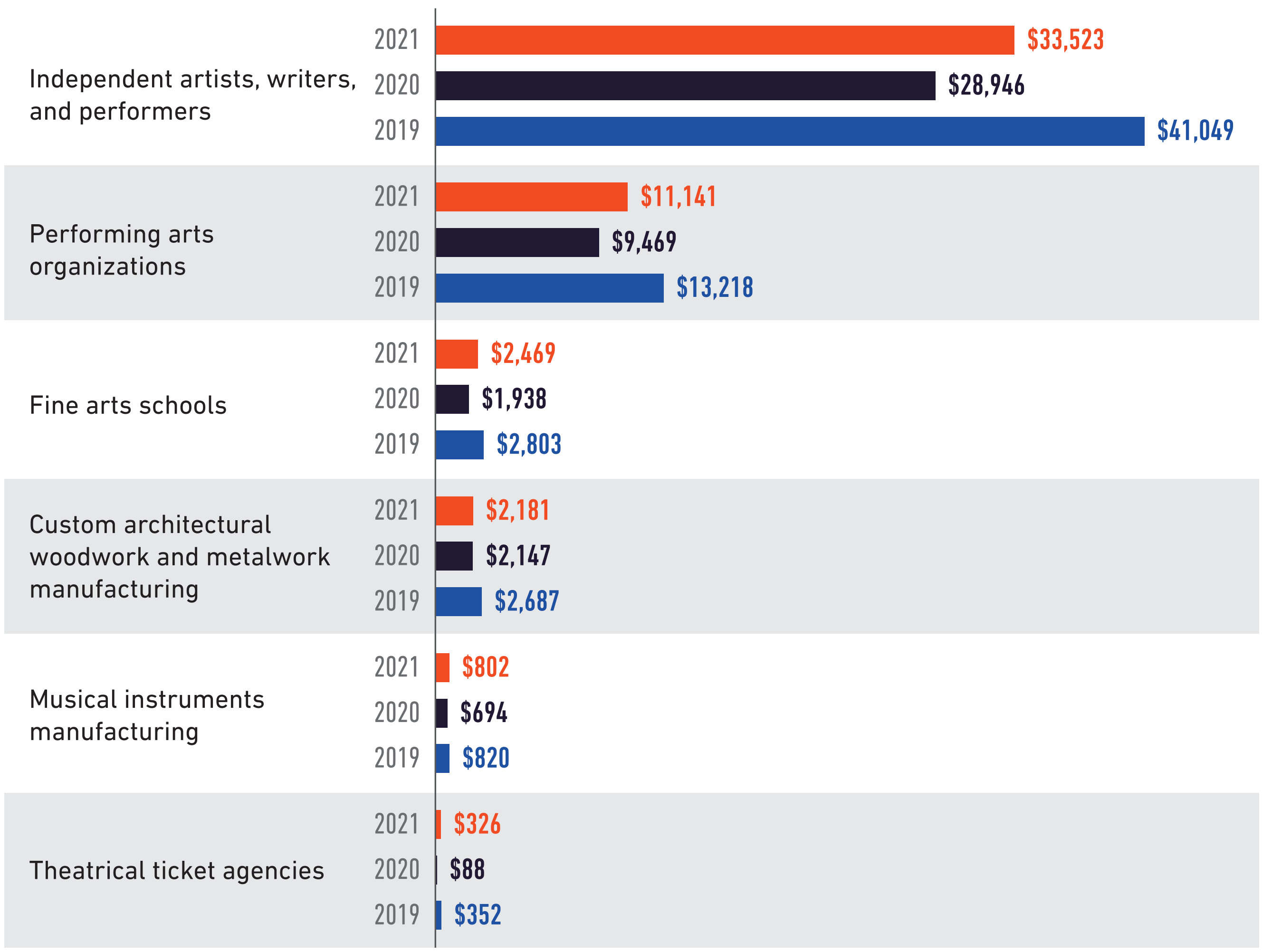
   - *Performing arts organizations* added $11.1 billion in 2021, compared with $9.5 billion in 2020, but still under the 2019 level of $13.2 billion.

   - While *theatrical ticket agencies* saw a nearly three-fold jump in their value to GDP (+$326 million) from 2020 to 2021, the figure remains below the 2019 level.

   - In 2021, the industries of *musical instrument manufacturing* and *fine arts schools* (excluding public schools) both came closer to their 2019 levels, in terms of economic value. *Custom architectural woodwork and metalwork manufacturing* stalled at roughly its 2020 level of value added, after taking a 20 percent hit that year (down from the 2019 level).

Changes in value added by select arts and cultural industries (2019-2021)

(inflation-adjusted dollars, in millions)



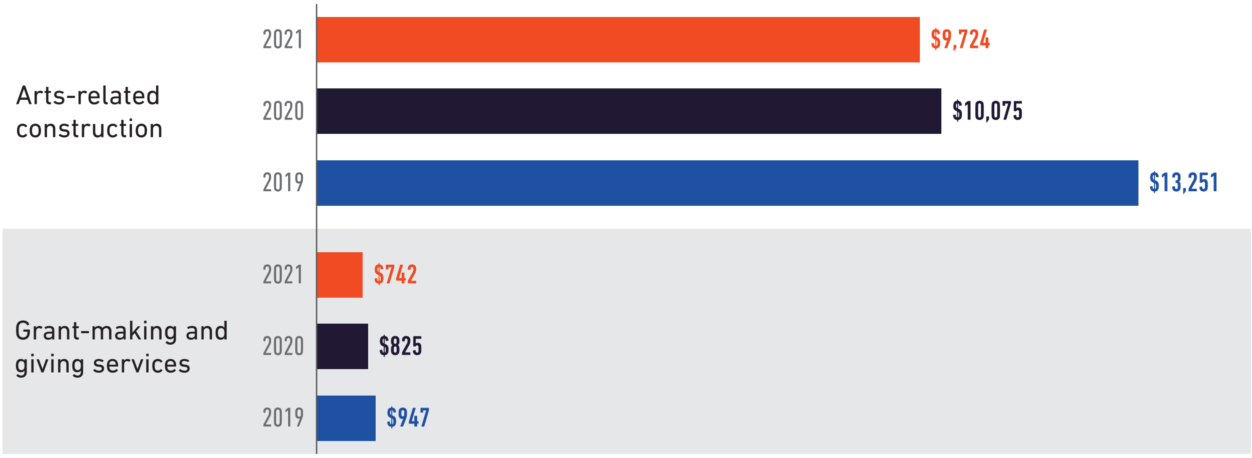
4. **Two arts and cultural industries, in particular, saw persistent declines** in economic value from 2019 through 2021.

   - After sustaining a 24 percent drop from 2019 to 2020, the value added by *arts-related construction* slipped further to $9.7 billion inflation-adjusted dollars in 2021—down from $10.1 billion in the prior year.

   - *Philanthropic services* (grant-making and giving), as an arts industry, experienced a 10.1 percent slump in economic value (down to $742 million in 2021), after already falling 13 percent from 2019 to 2020.

Changes in value added for select ACPSA industries (2019-2021)

(inflation-adjusted dollars, in millions)



5. **In 2021, just under 4.9 million workers were employed to produce arts and cultural goods and services,** for $504.2 billion in total compensation.

    - Between 2020 and 2021, 229,000 jobs were added to arts and cultural industries, a 5.0 percent increase. This compares with a 3.1 percent growth rate for all U.S. industry jobs over the same period.

    - Nevertheless, total arts employment has not recovered to the 2019 (pre-pandemic) level of 5.2 million jobs. In 2021, 23 out of 35 arts industries still employed fewer workers than in 2019.

    - For some arts industries in 2021, employment levels were higher than they were in the pre-pandemic year of 2019. Those industries include: *web publishing and streaming services*, which witnessed 13.6 percent growth in employment from 2019 to 2021; *industrial design services* (+10.5 percent), and *computer systems design* (+7.7 percent). Over the same period, job growth was modest for the industries of *arts retail, publishing, arts education services (non-public),* and *fine arts schools*.

6. Among the arts and cultural industries that were the hardest hit in 2020-- e.g., motion pictures, performing arts organizations, and performing arts presenters—many showed **considerable growth in jobs in 2021, but have not returned to pre-pandemic levels** of employment.

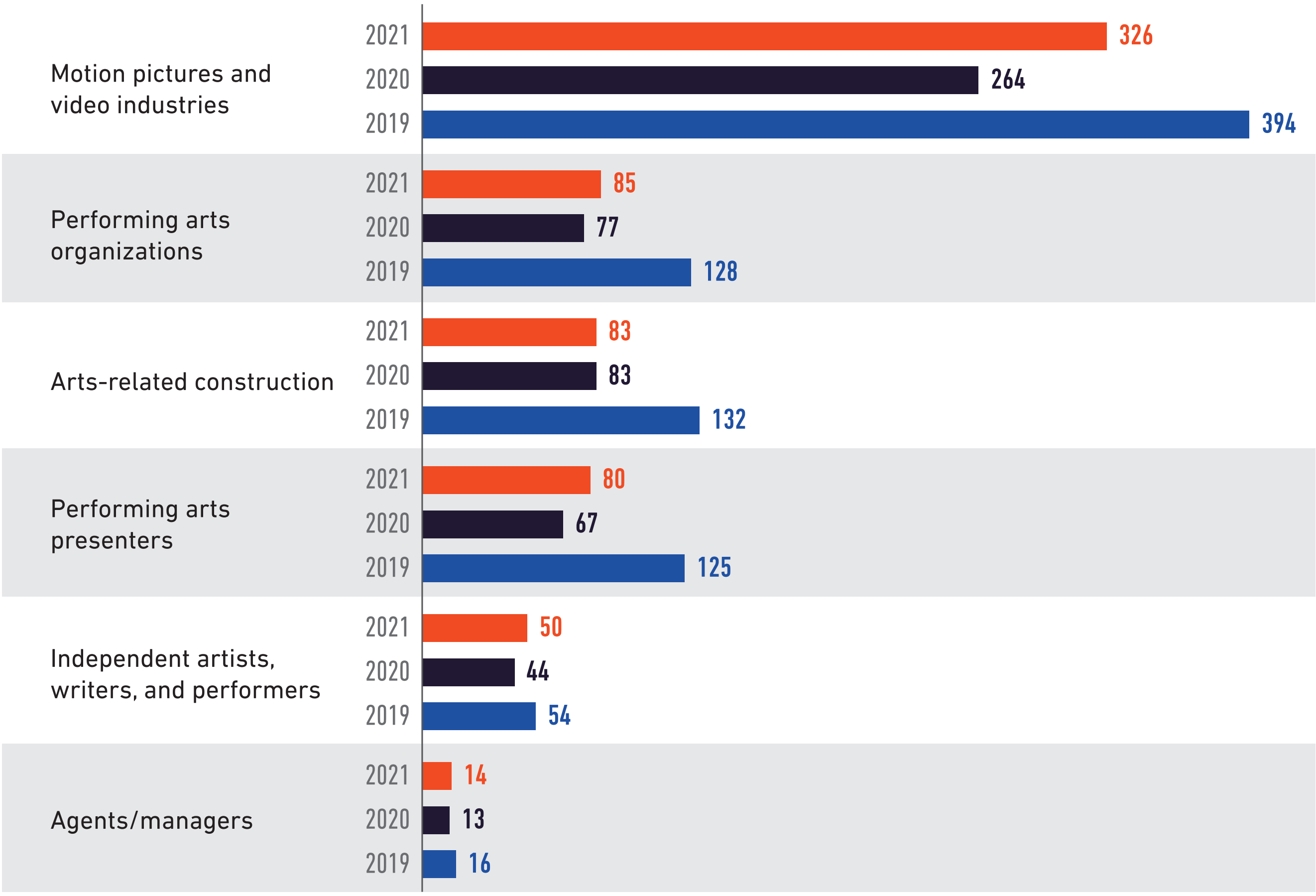
    - The fastest-growing arts and cultural industry from 2020 to 2021—in terms of employment—was *motion pictures*, which saw a 23 percent spike (up to 326,000 workers) from the previous year. In 2019, however, the industry employed 394,000 workers.

    - The number of workers employed by performing arts-related industries (including *performing arts organizations, performing arts presenters, agents or managers,* and *independent artists, writers, and performers*) grew by 14.4 percent in 2020-2021—up to 230,000 workers. Yet those industries employed a total of 323,000 workers in 2019.

    - *Arts-related construction* lost 49,000 jobs between 2019 and 2020 (a 37.1 percent decrease) and did not regain any in 2021. For this industry, total jobs remain at 83,000.

Changes in employment for selected arts and cultural industries (2019-2021)

(in thousands)

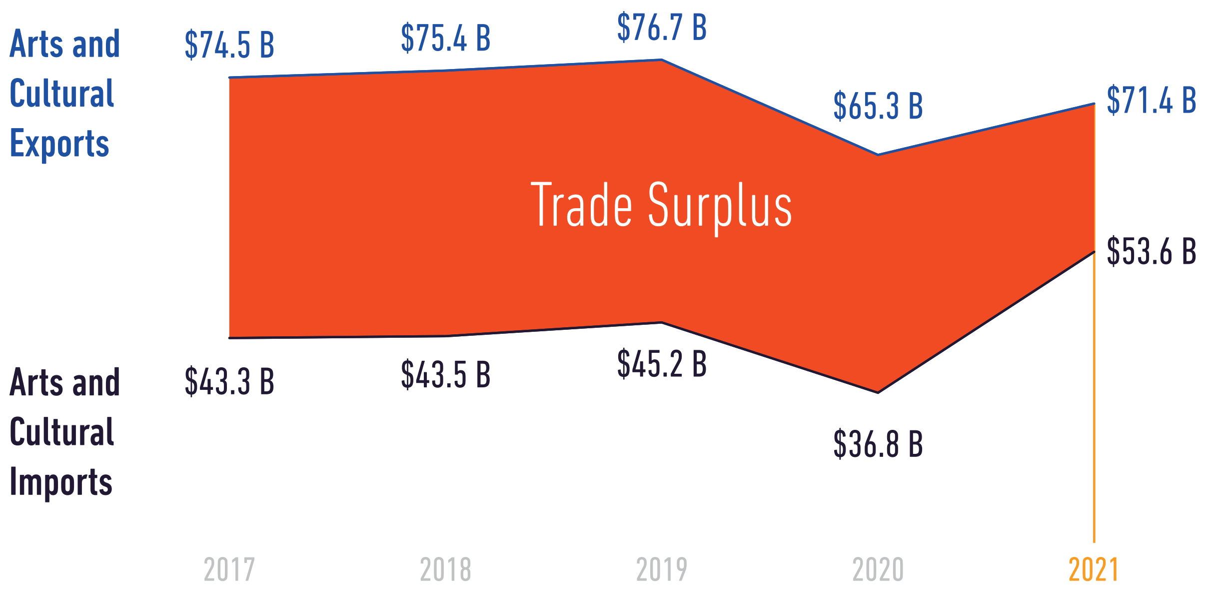


7. **The arts and cultural trade surplus shrank in 2021:** that year, it was $17.8 billion, compared with $28.5 billion in 2020 and $31.5 billion in 2019.

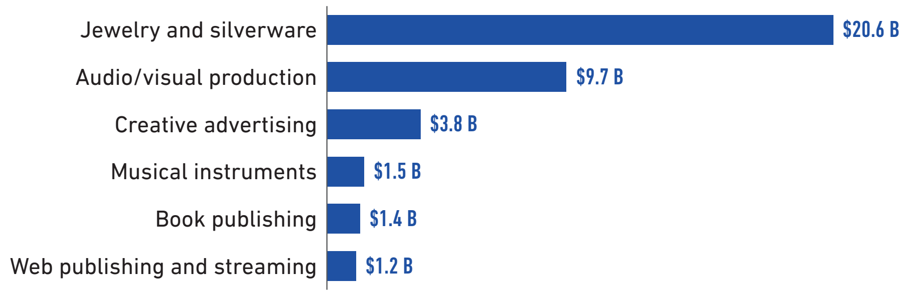
   - The 2020-2021 difference was due partly to a greater import value for arts and cultural goods and services than in prior years. Top imports in 2021 included *jewelry and silverware* ($20.6 billion), *other manufactured goods* such as glass and china ($11.4 billion), and *audio/visual production services for TV and movies* ($9.7 billion).

   - In 2021, lead arts export commodities in 2021 included *creative advertising* ($19.3 billion in exports), information services such as *audio/visual production for TV and movies* ($14.4 billion), and *arts-related software publishing* ($9.9 billion).

Imports and exports of arts and cultural goods and services (2017-2021)



Top imported arts and cultural goods and services in 2021



Top exported arts and cultural goods and services in 2021