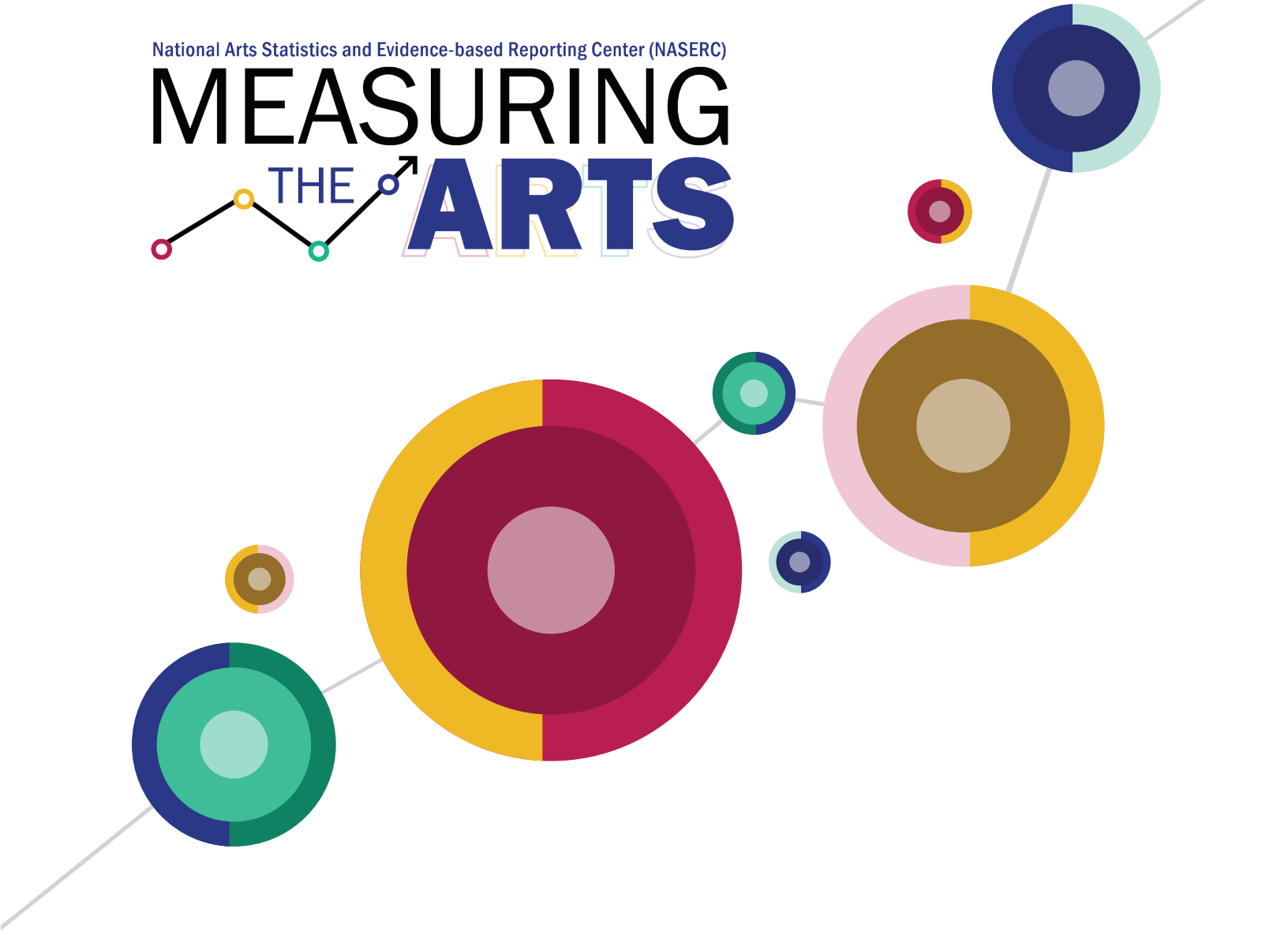
National Arts Statistics and Evidence-based Reporting Center (NASERC)

MEASURING THE ARTS



Domain A

Artists and Other Cultural Workers

Indicator A.1: **Who Are the Artists?**

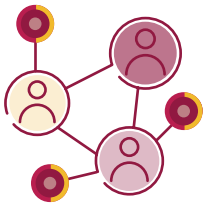
Key Findings

- In 2024, there were approximately 2.9 million artists in the total U.S. labor force, a 26 percent increase since 2015.
- Between 2015 and 2024, the artist occupations with the largest growth rates, all over 50 percent, were architects, fine artists, and announcers.
- In 2024, artists in the labor force generally had higher levels of formal education and were less racially and ethnically varied compared to the total labor force.
- In 2024, artists were more likely than the total labor force to be female, Asian, White, or of more than one race, and less likely to be male, Black, Hispanic, or American Indian/Alaska Native.

Introduction

Artists in the United States represent a varied group of talented individuals whose creative work strengthens communities and drives innovation in the workplace. Artistry and design constitute key elements of our social fabric and contribute substantially to the country's total economic activity. Using data from the American Community Survey (ACS), Indicator A.1 explores the characteristics of artists in the U.S. labor force. In this and other indicators in the series, artists are defined by their self-reported primary occupation.[1] For more information on this definition, see *Artist definition* box.

Artist definition



The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) has developed a list of 11 specific artist occupations: architects (including landscape architects); fine artists, art directors, and animators; designers; actors; producers and directors; dancers and choreographers; musicians (including music directors and composers); entertainers; announcers; writers and authors; and photographers. These occupations have been used in this indicator, though some categories have been combined for reporting purposes.

For more information, see the 2019 NEA publication Artists and Other Cultural Workers: A Statistical Portrait.

While labor force data from the ACS provide an important view of artists in the United States, they reflect only a portion of the broader artist population. Because Indicator A.1 relies on ACS labor force data and defines artists by their primary occupation, it captures only those whose artistic work fits within established occupational categories in the ACS. This approach excludes people whose artistic practice is central to their livelihood, identity, or income but who are not classified under artist occupations in traditional labor force surveys. For this reason, Indicator A.1 should be understood as capturing an important, but incomplete, segment of the nation's artist population.

People whose occupations are not covered under the artist definition but who are employed in cultural occupations that support the arts are described in **Indicator A.2: Who Are the Other Cultural Workers?** Young artists and cultural workers are described further in **Indicator A.8: What Are the Labor Market Outcomes for Young Artists and Other Cultural Workers?** Those who personally perform or create art—regardless of whether it is part of their employment—are described in **Indicator B.3: Who is Personally Creating or Performing Art?** The arts teacher workforce, which is also not captured in this indicator but constitutes a major category of workers in the arts, is described in **Indicator D.2: Who Teaches the Arts in Schools?**

This indicator includes artists who are in the labor force (i.e., either currently employed in an artist occupation or unemployed and looking for work in an artist occupation). It captures employed artists in the labor force regardless of work intensity (full-time or part-time status) and class of worker (private or wage-salary, government, or self-employed). Detailed information on the labor force status and employment characteristics of artists, including trends

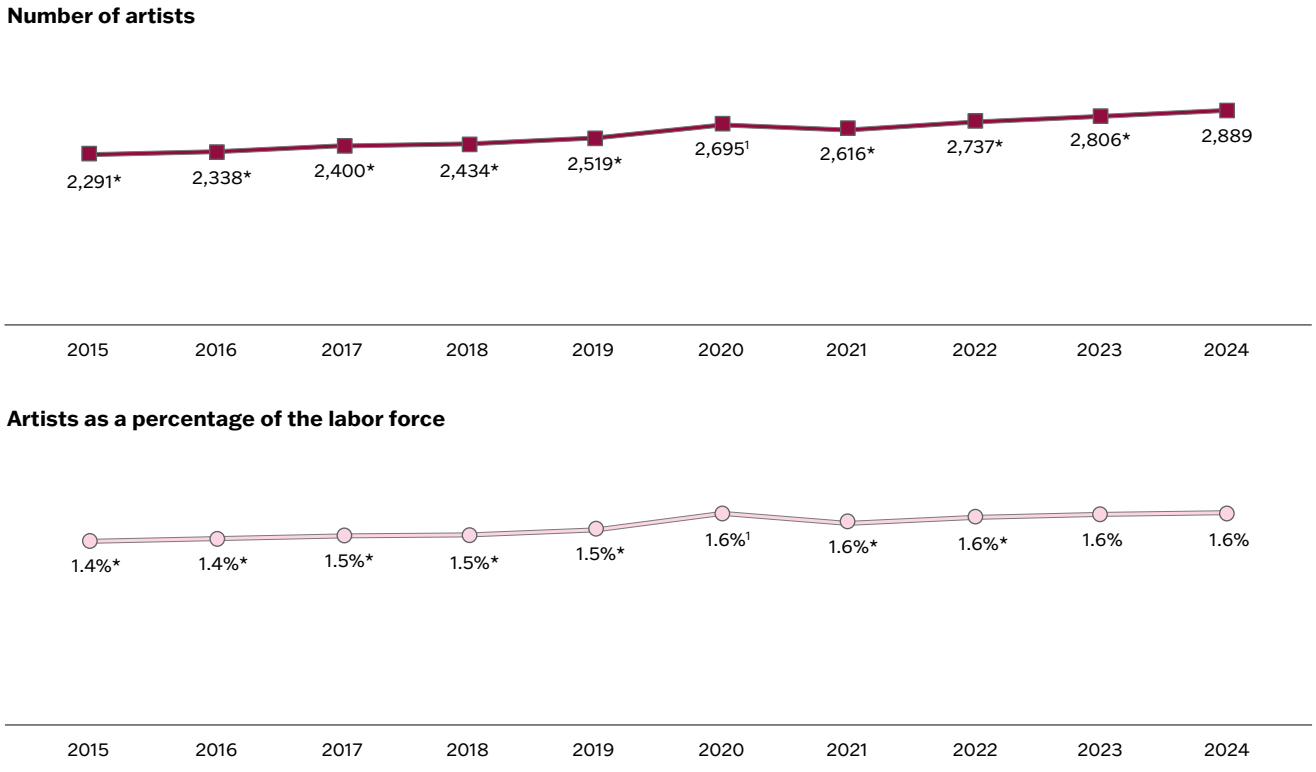
[1] "Primary occupation" refers to the kind of work a person does for pay most of the time. The American Community Survey (ACS)—the data source for this indicator—asks only about the occupation corresponding to a respondent's current or most recent job or, if they have two or more jobs, the job with the most usual hours worked. For more information, see https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/tech_docs/subject_definitions/2024_ACSSubjectDefinitions.pdf.

in employment and unemployment rates, individuals holding primary and secondary jobs in the arts, and differences by work intensity, are described in **Indicator A.5: What is the Labor Market Status of Artists and Other Cultural Workers?** The work classification of artists and the industries they are most often employed in is described in **Indicator C.3: How Many Artists and Other Cultural Workers are Employed in Arts Organizations and Businesses?**

Types of artists

In 2024, there were approximately 2.9 million artists in the total U.S. labor force (**Figure A1-1**). This represents a 3 percent increase from 2023, when there were 2.8 million artists in the labor force, and an overall increase of 26 percent since 2015, when there were 2.3 million artists in the labor force.[2] The share of artists in the total workforce in 2024 remained steady from the previous year at 1.6 percent. This finding suggests that growth in the number of artists largely kept pace with overall workforce growth during this period.

Figure A1-1. Number of artists in the total labor force and artists as a percentage of the total labor force: 2015–2024

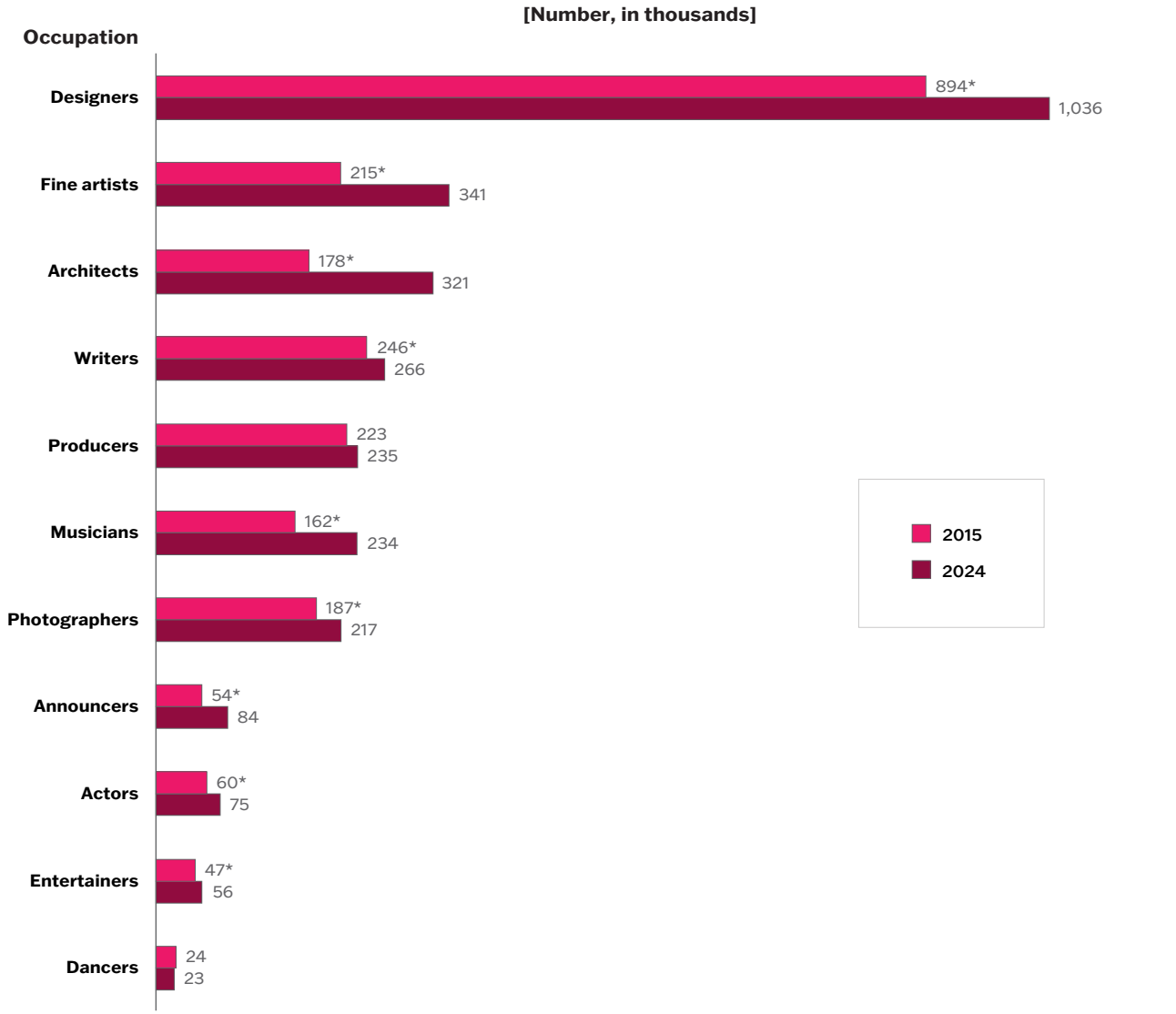


* Significantly different ($p < .05$) from 2024.
[1] Interpret with caution. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Census Bureau considered the 2020 1-year American Community Survey (ACS) to be experimental. These estimates may not meet all Census Bureau quality standards and may have variance properties that differ from previous years. See reference on page 16 of https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/experimental/2020/documentation/pums/ACS2020_PUMS_README.pdf.
NOTE: Artists in the labor force are individuals currently employed in an artist occupation (regardless of work intensity [employed full time or part time] and class of worker [private or wage-salary, government, or self-employed]) or unemployed and looking for work in an artist occupation.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015–2024.

[2] Differences between estimates (including trends over time) are stated only when they are statistically significant, based on a 95 percent level of confidence. For more information see *The Arts in the United States: Developing Key National Indicators of Arts Activity* technical report.

Among the 2.8 million artists in the labor force in 2024, the artist occupations[3] with the greatest number of workers were designers (1.0 million), fine artists (341,000), architects (321,000), writers (266,000), musicians (235,000), producers (234,000), and photographers (217,000; **Figure A1-2**). The number of workers in most artist occupations in 2024 exceeded the number reported in 2015, except for dancers and musicians, which did not measurably change.

Figure A1-2. Number of artists in the total labor force, by artist occupation: 2015 and 2024



* Significantly different ($p < .05$) from 2024.
NOTE: Artists in the labor force are individuals currently employed in an artist occupation (regardless of work intensity [employed full time or part time] and class of worker [private or wage-salary, government, or self-employed]) or unemployed and looking for work in an artist occupation."Architects" include architects and landscape architects. "Dancers" include dancers and choreographers. "Fine artists" include fine artists, art directors, and animators. "Musicians" include music directors, composers, and musicians. "Producers" include producers and directors. "Writers" include writers and authors.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015 and 2024.

[3] "Architects" include architects and landscape architects. "Dancers" include dancers and choreographers. "Fine artists" include fine artists, art directors and animators. "Musicians" include musicians, music directors, and composers. "Producers" include producers and directors. "Writers" include writers and authors.

Demographic characteristics of artists

When compared with the total U.S. labor force, artists show somewhat less demographic variation (**Figure A1-3**). In 2024, artists were more likely than the total labor force to be female, Asian, White, or of more than one race, and less likely to be male, Black, Hispanic, or American Indian/Alaska Native. However, the magnitude of these differences varied.

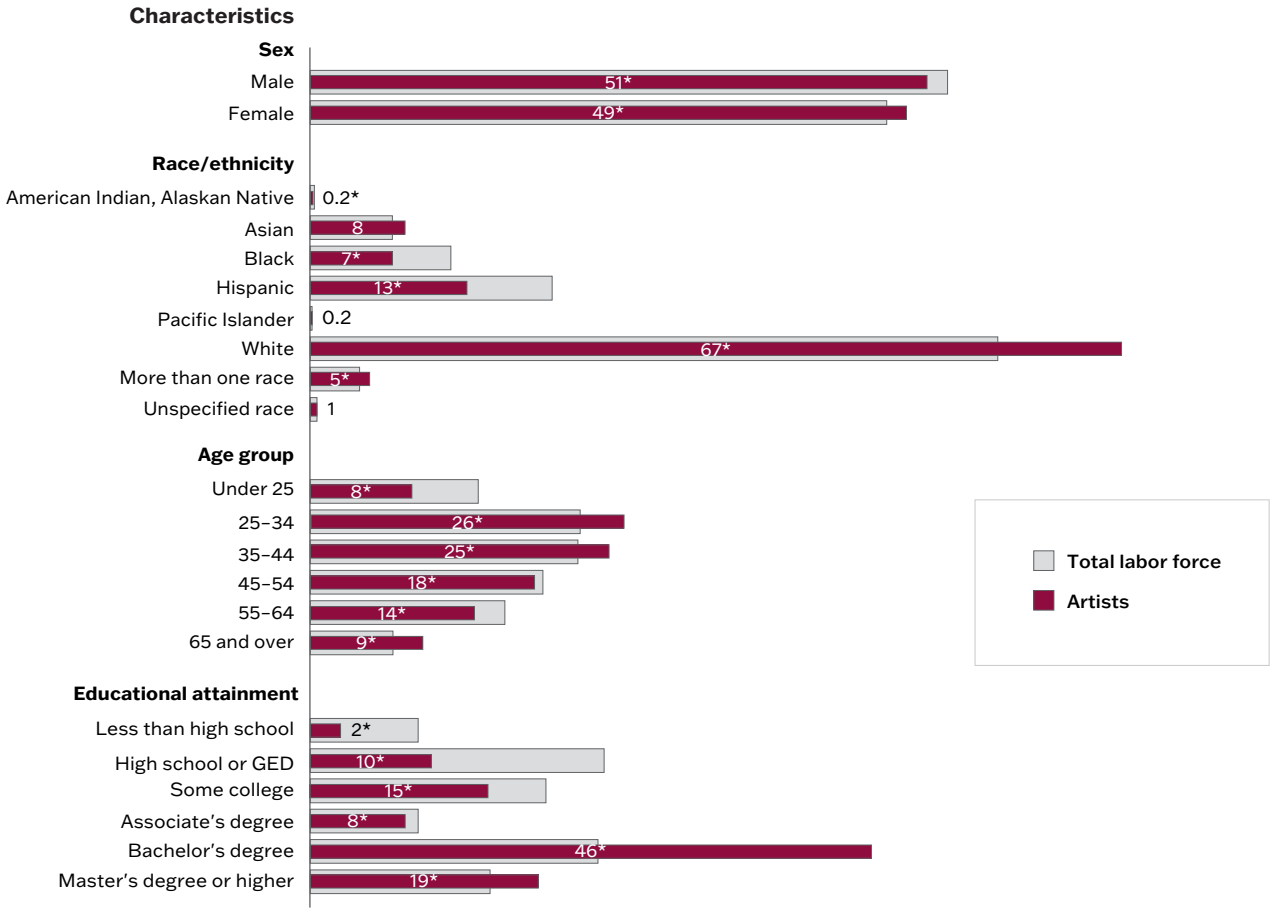
For example, the proportion of female artists (49 percent) was only slightly higher than among all workers in the labor force (48 percent). In contrast, the largest demographic differences were in the shares of White and Hispanic workers: artists were more likely to be White (67 percent) and less likely to be Hispanic (13 percent) than the total labor force (57 percent and 20 percent, respectively). Artists were also less likely to be Black (7 percent) compared to the total labor force (12 percent). Meanwhile, the shares of artists who were Asian (8 percent) or of more than one race (5 percent) were only slightly higher than in the total labor force (7 percent and 4 percent, respectively). There were no measurable differences between the percentages of artists and all workers who were Pacific Islander or whose race was not specified.

Age patterns among artists diverge from those of the overall labor force. In 2024, a smaller share of artists were under age 25 (8 percent) compared to the total labor force (14 percent), while a slightly larger share were age 65 or older (9 percent) compared to the total labor force (7 percent). The age distribution of artists was more concentrated in early- to mid-career age ranges: the percentages of artists aged 25–34 (26 percent) and aged 35–44 (25 percent) were higher than in the total labor force (both 22 percent). In contrast, the percentages of artists aged 45–54 (18 percent) and aged 55–64 (14 percent) were lower than the total labor force (19 percent and 16 percent, respectively).

In 2024, artists generally had higher levels of formal education than the total labor force. Relatively fewer artists had not completed high school (2 percent) or had completed only high school (10 percent) compared to the total labor force (9 percent and 24 percent, respectively). Similarly, relatively fewer artists had attended only some college[4] (15 percent versus 19 percent) or had an associate's degree as their highest level of attainment (8 percent versus 9 percent). In contrast, about twice as many artists had a bachelor's degree as their highest level of attainment (46 percent) compared to the total labor force (24 percent). Additionally, 19 percent of artists had completed a master's degree or higher, compared to 15 percent of the total labor force.

[4] "Some college" includes individuals who attended college but did not receive a degree.

Figure A1-3. Percentage distribution of artists and the total labor force, by sex, race/ethnicity, age group, and educational attainment: 2024

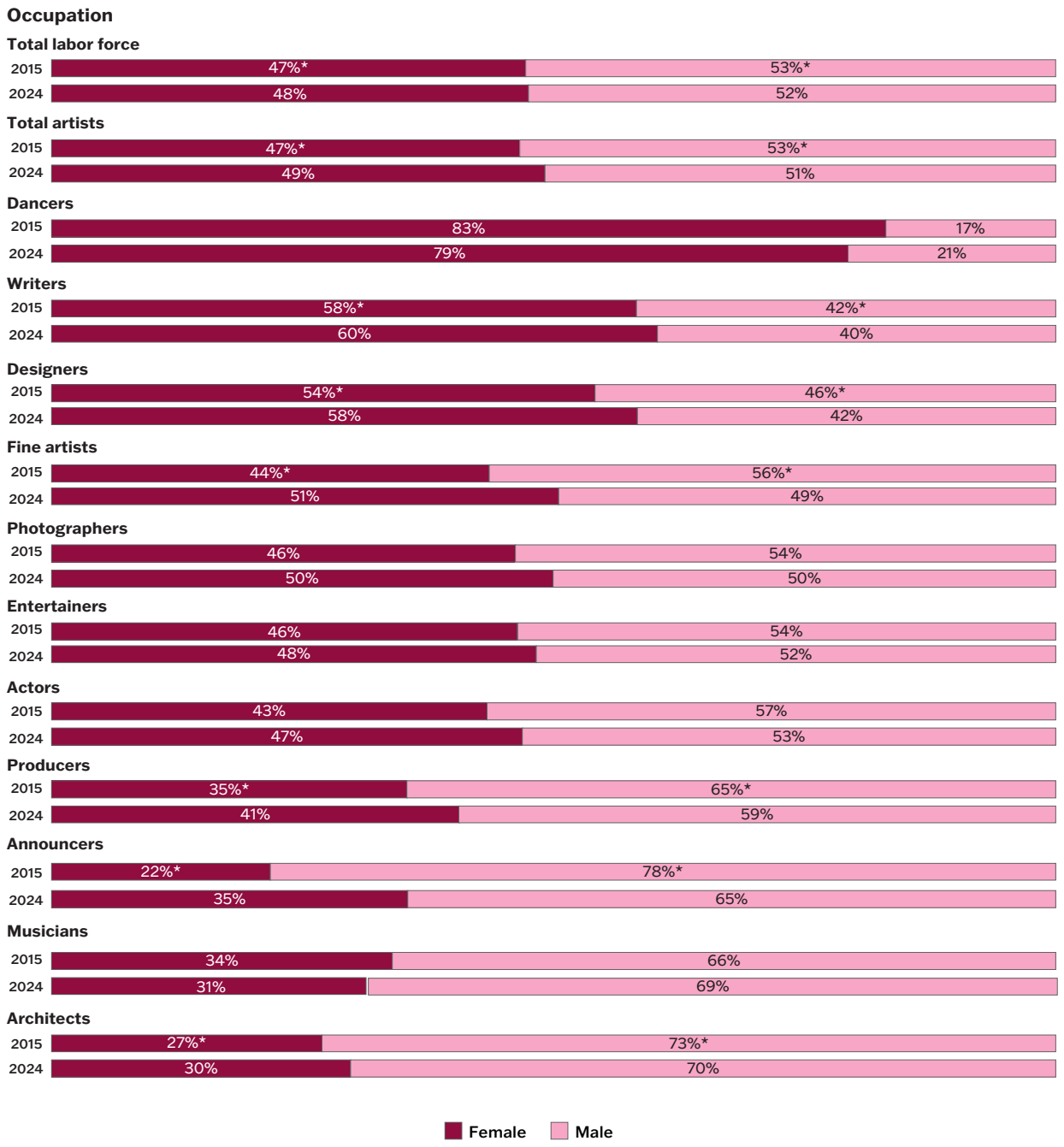


* Significantly different ($p < .05$) from the total labor force.
NOTE: Artists in the labor force are individuals currently employed in an artist occupation (regardless of work intensity [employed full time or part time] and class of worker [private or wage-salary, government, or self-employed]) unemployed and looking for work in an artist occupation. Race groups are mutually exclusive; persons of Hispanic ethnicity can be of any race. Data for some race categories are not available due to small sample size. "Some college" includes individuals who attended college but did not receive a degree.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2024.

Demographics and trends in artist occupations

In addition to key differences in the demographics of artists as a whole compared to the total labor force, there was also significant variation among artists by occupation. In 2024, the percentage of female workers in artist occupations ranged from lows of 30 percent for architects and 31 percent for musicians to a high of 79 percent for dancers (**Figure A1-4**). The percentage of female workers among artists overall rose modestly between 2015 and 2024 (from 47 percent to 49 percent), while the increase in the total labor force was minimal (from 47 percent to 48 percent). During this period, percentages of female announcers, architects, designers, fine artists, and producers increased, while actors, dancers, entertainers, musicians, photographers, and writers saw no measurable changes. The largest increase in the percentage of female workers was for announcers—from 22 percent to 35 percent. No artist occupations saw a decrease in the percentage of female workers between 2015 and 2024.

Figure A1-4. Percentage distribution of the total labor force and artists, by artist occupation and sex: 2015 and 2024



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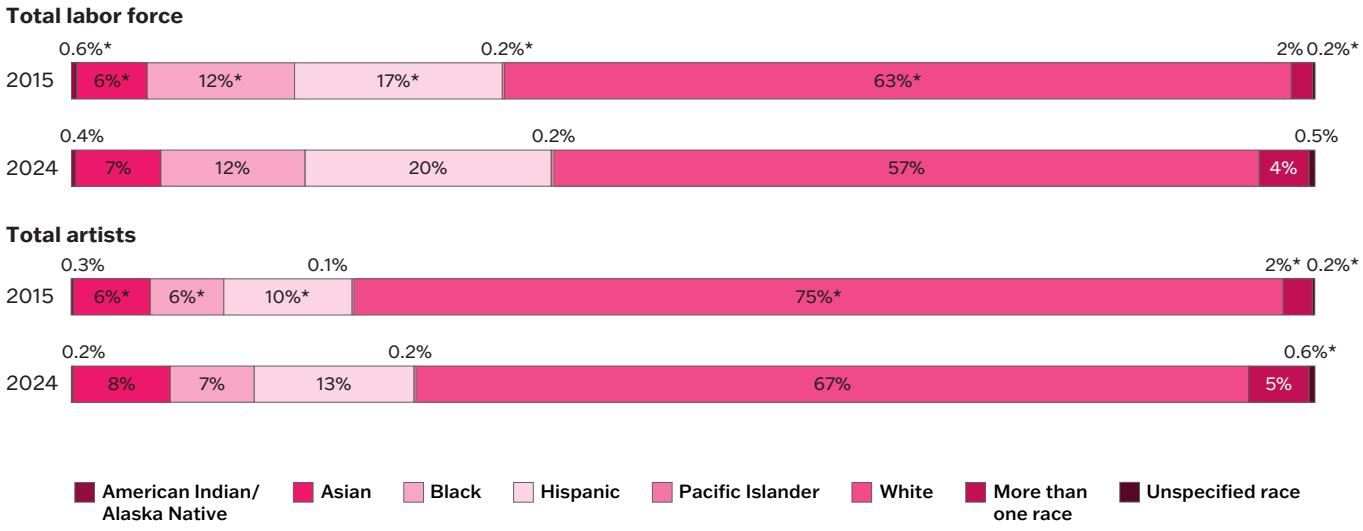
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015 and 2024.

Between 2015 and 2024, several artist occupations saw increases in the shares of workers from different racial and ethnic backgrounds (**Figure A1-5**). The overall share of artists who were Black increased slightly from 6 percent in 2015 to 7 percent in 2024, with growth among designers (from 4 percent to 5 percent), producers (from 7 percent to 10 percent), and writers (from 4 percent to 7 percent; see **Table A1-3**). The percentage of Hispanic artists also increased overall, from 10 percent in 2015 to 13 percent in 2024, and grew in more than half of the artist occupations. For example, the percentage of Hispanic announcers rose from 13 percent in 2015 to 21 percent in 2024, and the percentages of Hispanic fine artists and musicians both increased from 9 percent to 13 percent. The percentage of Asian artists increased modestly overall during this period, from 6 percent in 2015 to 8 percent in 2024, with growth in the percentages of Asian architects, designers, fine artists, musicians, and producers. Finally, the shares of artists identifying as of more than one race or whose race was not specified both increased slightly between 2015 and 2024, rising from 2 percent to 5 percent and 0.2 percent to 0.5 percent, respectively. There were no measurable differences in the percentages of artists who were American Indian/Alaska Native or Pacific Islander between 2015 and 2024.

Figure A1-5. Percentage distribution of the total labor force and artists, by race/ethnicity: 2015 and 2024



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NOTE: Artists in the labor force are individuals currently employed in an artist occupation (regardless of work intensity [employed full time or part time] and class of worker [private or wage-salary, government, or self-employed]) or unemployed and looking for work in an artist occupation. Race groups are mutually exclusive; persons of Hispanic ethnicity can be of any race. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2015 and 2024.

Compared to the total labor force in 2024, there was a general pattern of fewer artists in the youngest age group of workers, and more artists in the oldest age group (**Figure A1-3**). However, this pattern varied by artist occupation (see **Table A1-3**). Some occupations had particularly smaller shares of workers under age 25, especially those typically requiring college degrees. For example, only 3 percent of architects were under age 25. In contrast, 45 percent of dancers were under age 25, much higher than the percentage of the total labor force in this age group (14 percent). Many artist occupations also had higher shares of workers aged 25–34 than the overall labor force (22 percent). This included dancers (36 percent), actors (29 percent), photographers (28 percent), designers (27 percent), fine artists (27 percent), producers (27 percent), and writers (24 percent). A larger share of artists were aged 65 and over (9 percent) compared to the overall labor force (7 percent), though two artist occupations—dancers and producers—had lower percentages of workers in this age group (3 percent and 5 percent, respectively).

As previously noted, artists in the labor force in 2024 tended to have more formal education than the total labor force (**Figure A1-3**). Yet this pattern was not uniform across artist occupations. For example, dancers and entertainers were about as likely as all workers in the total labor force to have not completed high school, to have completed only completed some college, or to hold an associate's degree as their highest level of education (see **Table A1-3**). In contrast, most other artist occupations had higher shares of workers with a bachelor's degree as their highest level of educational attainment. These shares ranged from 32 percent among entertainers to 56 percent among producers, compared to 24 percent in the total labor force. The percentage of dancers with a bachelor's degree was not measurably different from that of the total labor force. Overall, a larger percentage of artists had a master's degree or higher (19 percent) compared to the total labor force (15 percent), but this was not consistent across artist occupations. While the percentages for actors and fine arts were not measurably different, architects (41 percent), writers (32 percent), musicians (25 percent), and producers (17 percent) were more likely to have a master's degree or higher compared to the total labor force. Designers (13 percent), announcers (12 percent), photographers (9 percent), entertainers (11 percent), and dancers (6 percent) were less likely.