

Acme's Artist Tenant Survey

July 2023

ACME 50

SUPPORTING ARTISTS FOR 50 YEARS

Foreword

Over the past 50 years, **Acme has supported over 8,500 artists in necessitous circumstances.** Our core values of **humanity, trust and stability** run through all aspects of our work, informing our decision-making and approach, both now, and into the future.

The Acme Artist Tenant Survey was initially intended as an internal document. We wanted to **better understand the challenges facing our current artists and their studio needs** and, by extension, **identify where Acme's provision might need to be strengthened.**

We received **responses from artists engaged in the full spectrum of contemporary arts practice,** with many tenants working across multiple disciplines. Artists found that **having an Acme studio was essential in maintaining safety and as a place to create** but, just as importantly, **their studios were described as spaces to think, daydream, plan, and explore.**

Viewed alongside our other recent research [Understanding the Value of Artists' Studios](#) (2022) and [Studio Practice Fund Analysis & Discussion](#) (2021), **a picture of the immense commitment of artists with a studio-based practice in the capital begins to emerge.**

On top of particular and everyday precarity, the widespread economic, social and political impacts of recent years are taking a toll on artists' resilience. Financial pressures, precarious working conditions and the cost-of-living crisis paint an increasingly grim picture of artists' lived realities.

Despite Acme artists' dedication to their practice, **these challenges have a negative impact on how much time they spend in their studios.** They also result in the need for **additional labour to fund their practice and housing,** which impacts artists' physical and mental health.

In our 2014 Acme Tenant Survey, 10% of respondents considered themselves to have a disability, or a physical or mental health condition. **Almost ten years on, this figure has doubled to 20%.**

Increasing financial pressures and the cost-of-living crisis have left **many artists doubting the feasibility of continuing their practice.**

Almost 30% of respondents identify **financial pressures as the main reason why they may not continue to be an artist in five years' time.**

Nearly 75% of respondents indicated that they were struggling financially. Over 40% of our tenants said they could cover their general outgoings but were not in a position to contribute to a pension or savings. Almost 30% described their finances as tight but were able to put money away for the future, and just under 5% said they were unable to cover their outgoings and could not afford to continue as an artist for much longer.

Even though nearly half of our respondents considered themselves to be mid-career artists, **only 12% indicated that they could support themselves financially through their practice,** with income required from multiple other sources to survive. **It is becoming harder than ever for artists to live and work in the capital,** with an average of 27% of total monthly income being spent by our artists on their studio rent.

Acme works to support the largely invisible individual artists **upon whose labour the arts and culture sector rests.**

By publicly releasing our tenant survey, **we hope to build understanding of the specific commitment and situation of artists** whose practice requires physical studio space.

With over 1000 artists on our waiting list to secure long-term occupancy at an affordable level, **it's clear that there are not enough genuine options for artist studios with long-term tenure in London.**

It is our hope that these findings can **inform decision-making, discussions and commitments** towards making **permanent places for artists to live and work in London and beyond.**

Introduction

The Acme Artist Tenant Survey was conducted between 5 November 2021 - 4 April 2022 to **better understand the needs, backgrounds and current situations of our tenants so that we can improve upon the support we currently provide.**

The survey is divided into two parts. **Part one looks at tenant data** to gain a fuller picture of the artists we currently support and identify areas of improvement, while **part two builds on this data with more detailed information on tenant experiences**, provided anonymously and with space for comments.

Overall, out of Acme's **853** artist tenants, **226 (26.49%)** submitted responses to part one and **192 (22.50%)** replied to part two of the survey.

Acme in numbers*



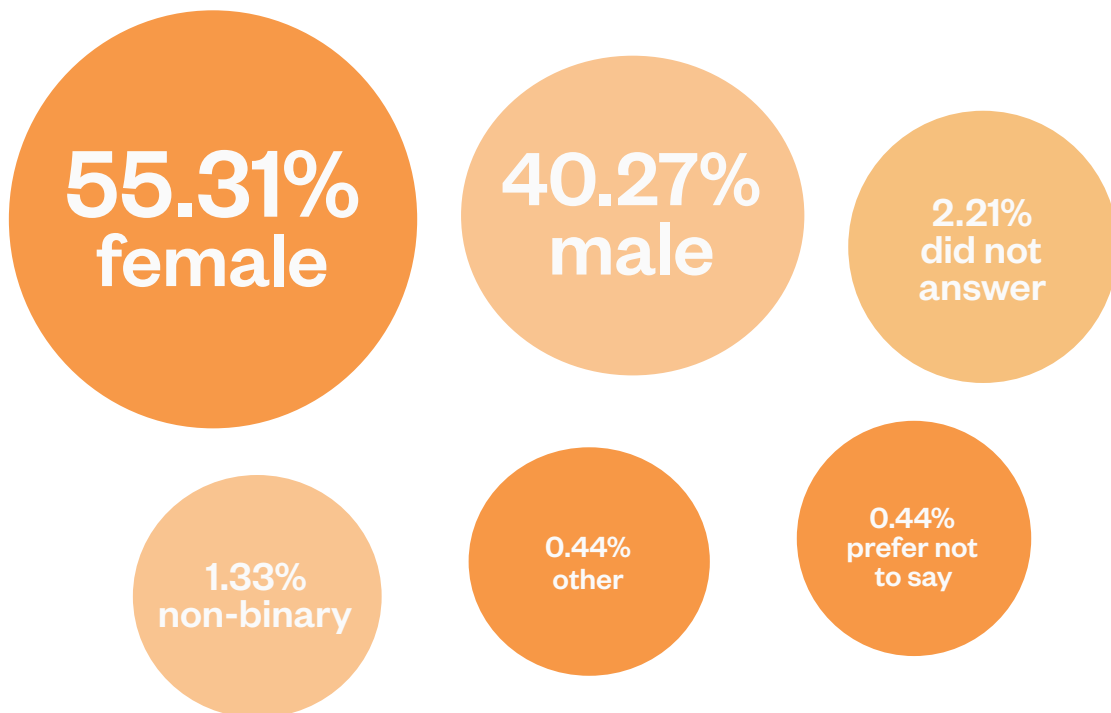
*Data correct at time of writing, February 2023

Acme's Artist Tenant Survey - Part one

The tenant data in part one of the survey includes the following: **gender, age, ethnic background, nationality, religion, disability and health conditions, relationship status, sexual orientation, socio-economic background, training and caring responsibilities.**

Gender

Over half of respondents identified as female, with just under half identifying as male.



Age

The **average age of survey respondents was 59 years old** (eldest 92 years old, youngest 26 years old). **26.99% of respondents were between 60-69 years old**, while the **fewest number of respondents were aged 20-29 or over 80 years old (0.88% each).**

20-29	0.88%
30-39	7.08%
40-49	22.12%
50-59	20.80%
60-69	26.99%
70-79	11.50%
80-89	0.44%
90-99	0.44%
Did not answer	9.73%

Ethnicity

White British/English/Scottish/Northern Irish	56.64%
White other background	22.57%
Mixed White and Asian	3.10%
White Irish	2.65%
Mixed other	2.65%
Prefer not to say	2.21%
Asian or Asian British other	1.33%
Asian or Asian British Chinese	1.33%
Black or Black British Caribbean	0.88%
Mixed White and Black Caribbean	0.88%
Asian or Asian British Indian	0.44%
Arab	0.44%
Black or Black British African	0.44%
Latinx	0.44%
Did not answer	3.98%

Nationality

UK National	64.16%
European Union/European Economic Area	16.81%
UK National; European Union/European Economic Area	5.31%
UK National; International (Non EU/EEA)	3.98%
International (Non EU/EEA)	2.21%
Prefer not to say	0.88%
European Union/European Economic Area; International (Non EU/EEA) (multiple options selected)	0.44%
UK National; European Union/European Economic Area; International (Non EU/EEA); prefer not to say (multiple options selected)	0.44%
Did not answer	5.75%

Religion

No religion	58.41%
Christianity	15.04%
Prefer not to say	9.29%
Other	3.10%
Buddhism	2.65%
Judaism	1.77%
No religion; prefer not to say (multiple options selected)	0.44%
Christianity; no religion (multiple options selected)	0.44%
Did not answer	9.29%

Disability and health conditions

20.35% of respondents considered themselves to have a disability. **3.98%** preferred not to say, **3.54%** did not respond.



As a disabled artist, having a private space where experiments can remain in place is vital. Additionally it provides a large, quiet space for me to rest in between activity, and to write.

Among the **20.35% of respondents** who said that they had a disability/impairment, a number of tenants specified their health conditions. Multiple options could be selected.

Long term chronic pain	11%
Mental health	7%
Disability/impairment	5%
Hearing	4%
Learning	4%
Other	3%
Breathing	3%
Visual	1%
Memory	1%
Did not answer	73%

Relationship status

60% of respondents said that they were **married or living with a partner**, **31%** were **single**, and **7%** preferred not to answer.

Sexual orientation

Heterosexual	65.92%
Prefer not to say	14.35%
Bisexual	5.83%
Gay man	3.59%
Queer	2.69%
Other	1.79%
Lesbian	1.79%
Asexual	0.90%
Pansexual	0.45%
Did not answer	2.69%

Socio-economic background

Q: How would you describe your class background as a child?

Middle-Class	34.96%
Lower Middle-Class	29.65%
Working-Class	19.03%
Prefer not to say	4.87%
Other	3.10%
Precariat (parents unemployed, or in precarious low waged unstable employment)	1.77%
Upper-Class	0.44%
Did not answer	6.19%

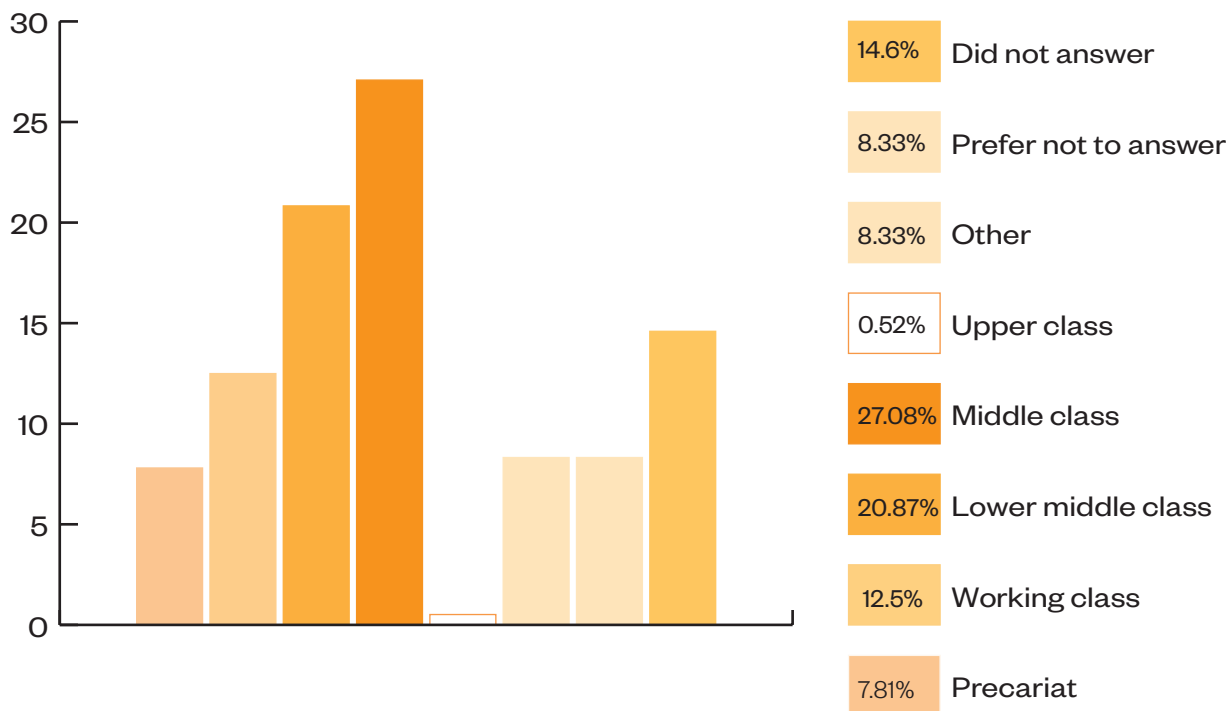
Q: What kind of work did the highest income earner in your household do when you were 14 years old?

Modern professional occupations	21.68%
Traditional professional occupations	16.37%
Semi-routine manual and service occupations	12.83%
Technical and craft occupations	12.39%
Middle or junior managers	8.85%
Clerical and intermediate occupations	5.75%
Other	4.87%
Prefer not to say	3.10%
Routine manual and service occupations	2.65%
This question does not apply to me	1.33%
Long-term unemployed	1.33%
Don't know	1.33%
Did not answer	7.52%

Q: What type of school did you mainly attend between the ages of 11 and 16?

State-run or state-funded school - non-selective	39.38%
Attended school outside the UK	24.34%
State-run or state-funded school - selective on academic, faith or other grounds	18.58%
Independent or fee-paying school - bursary	6.19%
Independent or fee-paying school - no bursary	5.31%
Other	1.33%
Don't know/prefer not to say	0.88%
Did not answer	3.98%

We also asked our tenants how they would describe **their current class position**:



Caring responsibilities

24.78% of respondents indicated that they had caring responsibilities, and 7.8% did not answer this question.

Of those with caring responsibilities, the breakdown of responsibilities is shown below. Multiple options could be selected.

Dual carer of a child or children (under 18 years old)	25.68%
Primary carer of a child or children (under 18 years old)	17.57%
Secondary carer (another person carries out main caring role)	13.51%
Primary carer or assistant for an older person or people (65 years old and over)	12.61%
Dual carer or assistant for an older person or people (65 years old and over)	9.46%
Prefer not to say	9.46%
Primary carer or assistant for a disabled adult (18 years old and over)	5.41%
Primary carer of a disabled child or children (under 18 years old)	2.7%
Dual carer or assistant for a disabled adult (18 years old and over)	2.7%
Dual carer of a disabled child or children (under 18 years old)	1.35%

“ I have busy work and family commitments so I need a local space with 24/7 access that allows me to work when I have the time (early morning, late nights etc.). It needs to be secure as I leave everything there, and store all my work (and equipment) onsite.

Of those who indicated that they were carers of children, 24% indicated that they sometimes brought their child to their studio while they worked, 2% did this frequently, while 30% rarely and 34% never.

Acme's Artist Tenant Survey - Part two

Part two of the survey was **anonymous and designed to find out more about our artist tenants, how they feel about their studios and about Acme more generally.** These findings will form a vital part of Acme's studio provision moving forward.

Responses cover **education and training, employment, tenants' studio practice, engagement with Acme, tenants' income and activities, and reflections on their careers.**

Overall, **192 tenants completed this section, representing 23% of Acme's overall artist tenant community at time of writing.**

Practice

Of the artist tenants who responded to part two of the survey, **painters, printmakers, sculptors, photographers, installation, video and performance artists, metal & glass workers, and writers** were represented. Many tenants indicated that they worked across **multiple disciplines.**

In relation to their practice for tax purposes, **67.71%** of respondents said that they were **sole traders**. **2.60%** were **limited companies**, **17.19%** were **not registered for tax** and **10.94%** did not answer.

26.56% of respondents described themselves as **emerging artists**, **46.88%** as **mid-career artists**, **15.53%** as **established artists** and 10.93% did not answer.

Education

Art education

Multiple options could be selected.

BA	67.71%
MA	61.98%
BTEC/HND/BND	14.58%
PhD	9.9%
Internship/placement	4.17%
Alternative education	4.17%
Other	4.17%
NVQ	3.65%
No arts training	3.65%
Prefer not to say	0.52%

Other education/training

Multiple options could be selected.

BA	14.58%
Other	14.06%
MA	8.85%
Alternative education	8.33%
BTEC/HND/BND	5.73%
NVQ	4.17%
Internship/placement	3.65%
PhD	3.13%
Prefer not to say	1.56%

Only **3%** had become an artist without undertaking a degree. **86%** of respondents had received a traditional higher education (BA, or equivalent, and higher) qualification in art. A further **6%** had a BA, or equivalent in a different subject. **5%** did not answer.

Travel time

54% of respondents had a travel time of **0-30 minutes** to get to their studio. **34%** travelled between **31 minutes - an hour**, **6%** travelled **1-2 hours**, while **1%** travelled **2-3 hours**. **5%** did not answer this question.

Willing travel time

47% of respondents were willing to travel up to **30 minutes**, **45%** were willing to travel between **31 minutes - 1 hour**. **8%** did not answer this question.



I've never been able to afford stable/secure/quiet/controllable accommodation. The studio provides a secure, accessible, and above all stable workplace where I can keep equipment set up and work relatively free of interruption.

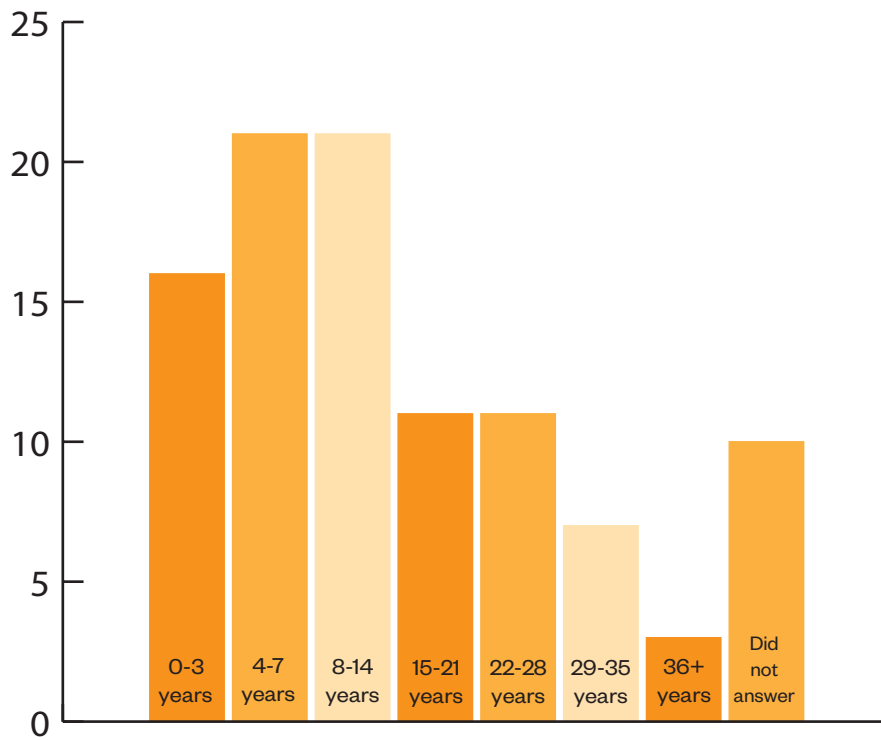
Long-term occupancy

82% of respondents indicated that **long term occupancy was very important**, with a further **8%** saying that it was important. **8%** did not answer this question.



In terms of my personal predicament, Acme has allowed me to make work in London, which otherwise I doubt I would have been able to do over such a long period.

How long have you been an Acme studio tenant?



Marylyn Molisso in her studio at Warton House. 2019. © Tom Carter

Finances

On average, their artistic practice represented **33% of respondents' income** and they had **1.5 sources of additional income**. Out of the 157 respondents that replied to this question, only **12% said that they could support themselves solely through their artistic practice**.



My studio allows a degree of stability and routine which balances well with my other contractual work.

Respondents **spent an average of 29 hours a week on their artistic practice**, representing **65% of their time spent on income-generating activities**. Respondents also spent 27% of their monthly income on studio rent, 28% on living expenses, 25% on housing and 10% on materials and arts practice expenses.

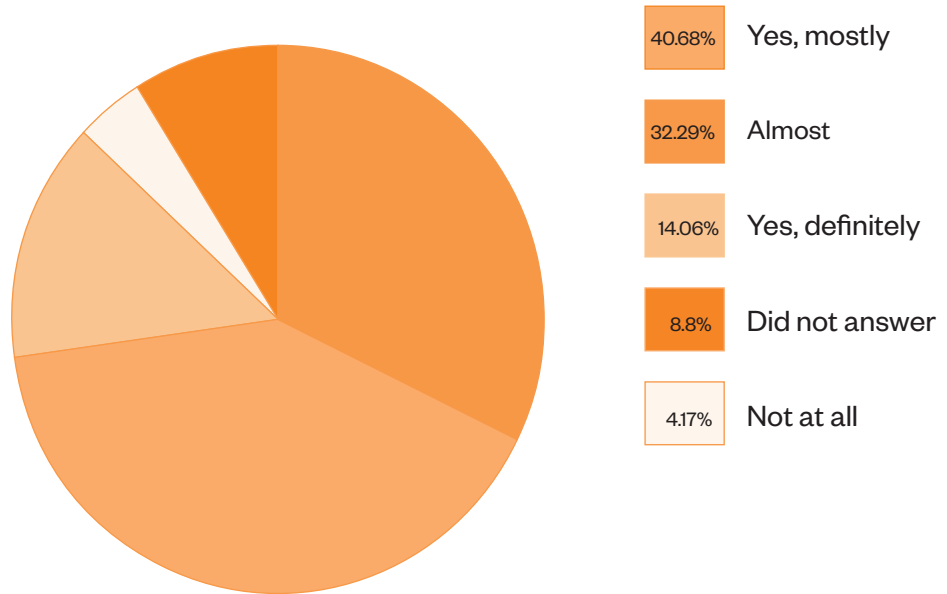
Employment

24% of respondents indicated that they undertook voluntary work. 13% did between 0-2 hours weekly, 10% did between 3-6 hours weekly, and 2% did between 7-10 hours, or over 10 hours weekly respectively.

We asked our tenants what types of contracts they have for their non-arts practice income. Multiple options could be selected. **34% of respondents indicated that they worked on a freelance basis.**

Freelance	34.9%
Part-time	17.71%
Permanent	14.58%
Zero hours	11.46%
Voluntary or unpaid work	7.81%
Fixed-term	6.25%
Full-time	3.13%
Full-time or part-time carer	2.6%
Shift work/no contract	1.56%
Studying or training	1.56%
Internship/placement	0.52%

When asked if they could **comfortably afford to maintain the costs of renting their studio** within their monthly budget **40.68%** responded **yes, mostly**, while **32.29%** responded **almost**.



The Future

We asked tenants if they would continue to be working as an artist in 5 years' time. **66.67%** said that they **definitely would**, **20.31%** **probably would**, **10.94%** **did not answer** and **2.08%** responded that they **probably would not**.

Q. Thinking about **the longevity of your artistic practice and the impact it has on your lifestyle and security**, which of these statements best applies to you?

I can cover my outgoings but am unable to contribute to a pension or savings	41.15%
Finances are tight but I am able to contribute to a pension or savings	28.65%
Did not answer	15.09%
I am comfortable financially and can contribute to a pension or savings if I choose to	10.42%
I cannot cover my outgoings and cannot afford to continue as an artist for much longer	4.69%

We asked our tenants if they believed their **income will return to pre-pandemic levels** within the next 6 months, **31.25%** responded **no**, while **27.6%** responded **yes**. **27.08%** replied that their income had been unaffected.

Q. If you **might not continue as an artist in five year's time**, what are the likely reasons behind this? Multiple options could be chosen.

Financial pressures	29.17%
Family or personal commitments or responsibilities	11.98%
Lack of time for art practice	10.42%
Lack of networks	6.25%
Lack of opportunities in my current location	4.69%
Higher/steadier pay in other industries	3.13%
Discrimination	2.60%
Lack of access to training/development opportunities	2.60%
Change of interest	1.04%
Other	0.09%

Of those who responded positively, **42% said they would definitely keep their Acme studio** and **37% probably would**, while **5% probably would not**, and **1% definitely would not**.

69% of respondents said that their Acme studio was essential to achieving their artistic aims, while **18% said that it was very important**. 12% did not answer.

78% said that their Acme studio influenced/impacted their artistic practice, **8% said it had no influence/impact**, and 14% did not answer.

Q. If you were to leave or change studios, what would the change consist of? Multiple options could be chosen.

A work from home studio	23.44%
Other	22.4%
Smaller and cheaper studio	13.54%
Nearer studio to home or paid employment	10.94%
An intermittent studio with more flexibility, i.e. less contractual/pay as you go	2.6%
A co-working studio	1.56%
No studio, studio space is not necessary for my practice	1.04%

Thank you

We thank the Acme artists who took the time to respond to our survey, which will inform our forthcoming 2025-2030 Strategic Plan.

Contact

Chris Mill
 Communications and Events Manager, Acme
chris.mill@acme.org.uk / +44 (0)20 8981 6811