

Arts Disciplines or Arts Industries

The Business Realities of the Arts World

Presented by
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Two Theses

The profit motive commercializes art and artistic practice.

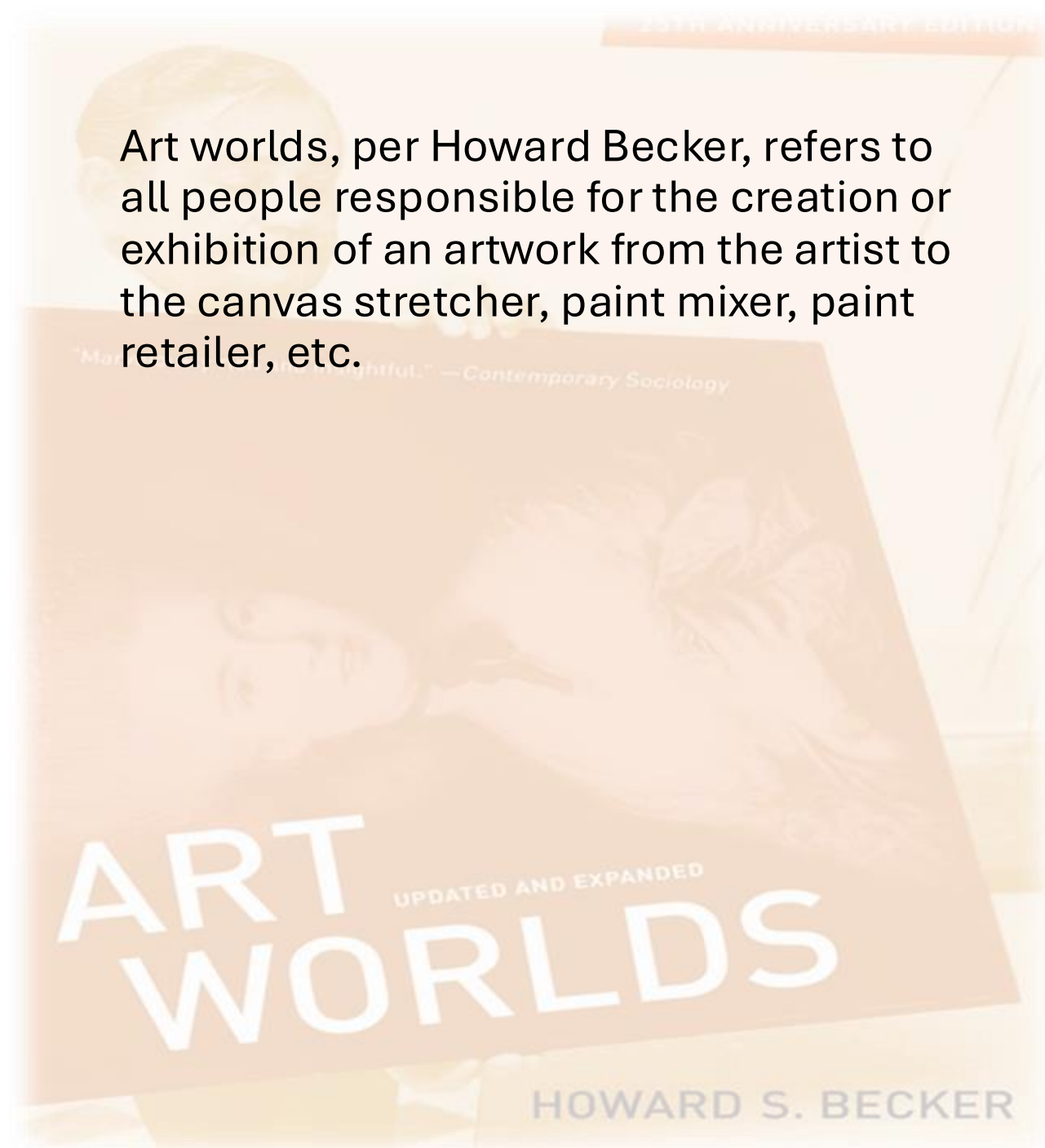
- Profit motive is bigger than the intention of the artist
- Some entity will profit off the artist, even if not a willing participant
- Through the lens of economic impact, the arts discipline is an industry

The arts (or creative) sector of St. Louis, Missouri is largely populated by gig workers

- Yes, there are arts administrators but...
 - Low overall wages suggest gig work and not living wage work
 - They are support personnel in the STL artworld, not always the artist
 - The artist appears to be mainly a gig worker

Howard Becker's *Art Worlds*

Art worlds, per Howard Becker, refers to all people responsible for the creation or exhibition of an artwork from the artist to the canvas stretcher, paint mixer, paint retailer, etc.

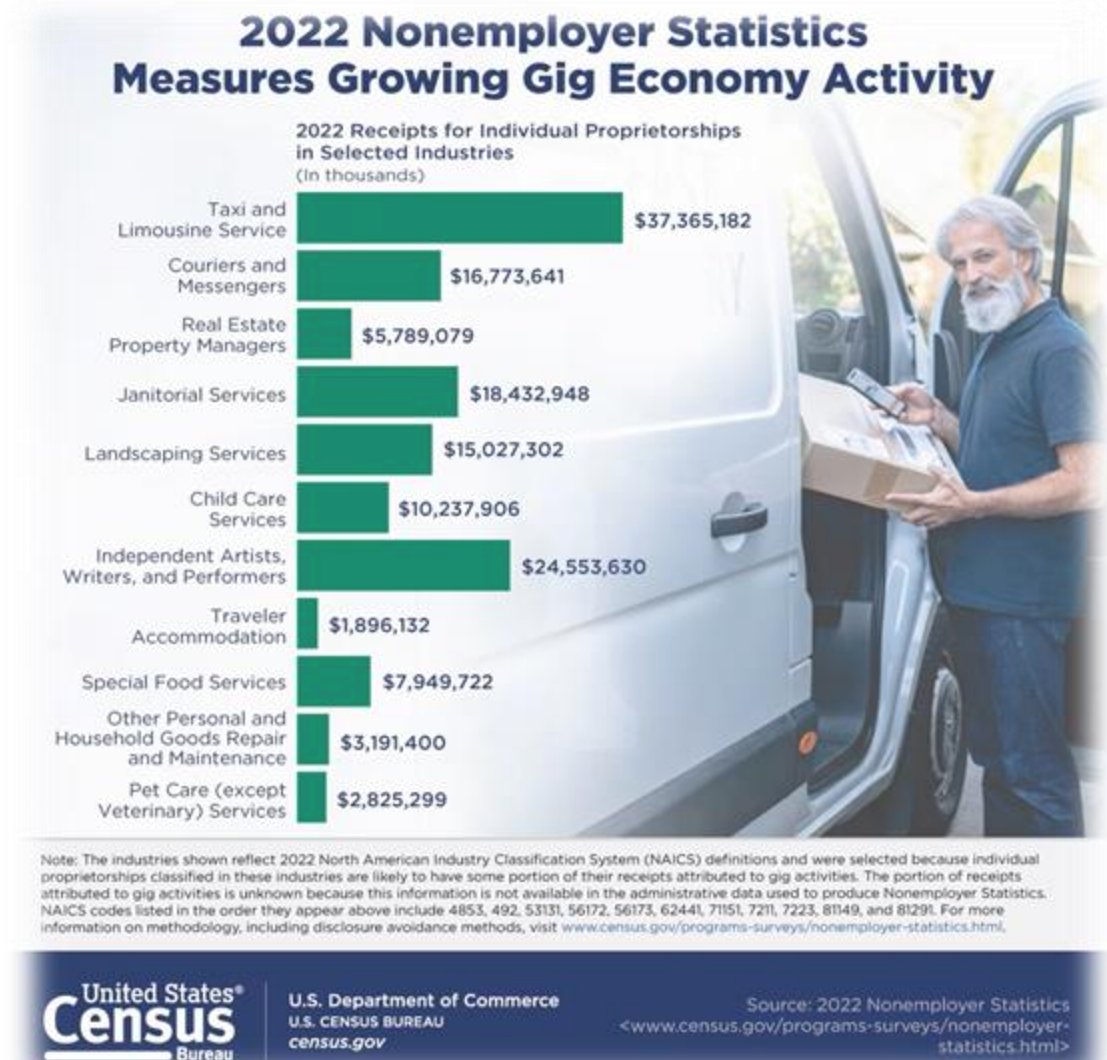


Blurred Lines of Entrepreneurs & Workers

In 2022, the US Census revealed the receipts of individual proprietorships in selected industries and independent artist receipts came in second to the Taxi and Limousine service industry, just ahead of Janitorial Services at \$24.5 billion.

What does that receipt look like for St. Louis?

\$91.6 million



Apples, Oranges, & the Fruit Salad of It All

- In 2023, RAC in Partnership with Americans for the Arts reported \$868.7 million in economic activity (spending) for St. Louis City and County Organizations in the Arts and Economic Prosperity 6 (AEP6) report in reference to 2022 data.
- For methodological reasons, we *should not* use the Nonemployer Statistic (NES) with the AEP6 number but it's so tempting.
 - Org direct spending: \$579,333,295 breaks down to a possible salary of \$42,607 in take home pay.
 - NES: $\$91,694,000 / 4,752 \text{ artists} = (\text{roughly}) \$19,295 \text{ annually}$

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "Nonemployer Statistics: 2022", Census.gov, accessed June 23, 2025.

Source: Americans for the Arts. (October 2023). *Arts & Economic Prosperity 6: The Economic and Social Impact Study of Nonprofit Arts and Their Audiences in Greater St. Louis*: Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis & Americans for the Arts.

Per the MIT Living Wage Calculator

The annual wages
needed to live in the St.
Louis area is \$37,899
after taxes.

AEP6: \$42K = Living wage
NES: \$19K = Not living wage

Living Wage

calculator

Methodology

FAQs

Contact

Living Wage Calculation for St. Louis, MO

The living wage shown is the hourly rate that an **individual** in a household must earn to support themselves and/or their family, working full-time, or 2080 hours per year. The tables below provide living wage estimates for individuals and households with one or two working adults and zero to three children. In households with two working adults, all hourly values reflect what one working adult requires to earn to meet their families' basic needs, assuming the other adult also earns the same.

The poverty wage and state minimum wage are for reference purposes. Poverty wage estimates come from the Department of Health and Human Services' [Poverty Guidelines](#) for 2025 and have been converted from an annual value to an hourly wage for ease of comparison. The state minimum wage data is sourced from the [Labor Law Center](#) and includes the minimum wage in a given state as of January of that year.

For further detail, please reference the [Methodology](#) page. The data on this page was last updated on February 10, 2025.

	1 ADULT				2 ADULTS (1 WORKING)				2 ADULTS (BOTH WORKING)		
	0 Children	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children	0 Children	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children	0 Children	1 Child	2 Children
Living Wage	\$21.61	\$38.39	\$49.31	\$60.33	\$30.25	\$35.95	\$39.99	\$45.80	\$15.09	\$21.79	\$27.27
Poverty Wage	\$7.52	\$10.17	\$12.81	\$15.46	\$10.17	\$12.81	\$15.46	\$18.10	\$5.08	\$6.41	\$7.73

990 Data

- Continuing with 2022:
 - As much as \$63,238,423 was spent on freelance workers
 - After a data scrape from 664 tax returns of tax-exempt entities
 - Note that the \$63.2 million may not have gone only to artists
 - This is understated due to availability of financial records of nonprofit arts orgs
 - No available data on number of arts workers except through NES
 - The \$19K in annual wages is based on NES data from one industry stat
 - If factoring two industry stats, artists increase but annual wage decreases

Notes on Nonemployer Data

- Last year, SMU DataArts used NES as one of thirteen factors to determine arts vibrancy – which STL ranked 20 of 20 in 2023 for Large Communities

SMU DataArts

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Arts Vibrancy 2023

Executive Summary

[The Top 40 List](#)

Methodology

Press Release

The Map

State Analysis

The Top 40 Arts-Vibrant Communities of 2023

We assess communities' vibrancy through a data-driven approach using data available in all U.S. communities to remove influences of opinion or geographically-limited data on the final results. The vibrancy assessment consists of rubrics covering aspects of supply, demand, and public support for arts and culture.

The results of this analysis are not based on a simple counting exercise that might benefit areas with higher populations or the most arts and cultural institutions. Adjusting values on a per capita basis as well as accounting for differences in costs of living enable this analysis to level the playing field as much as possible. Large cities and small communities alike can showcase their vibrant characteristics compared to all other communities across the country.

Ranking	Top 20 Large Communities	Region	Population	Cost of Living Index[?]
1	San Francisco-San Mateo-Redwood City, CA	West	1,537,618	181
2	New York-Jersey City-White Plains, NY-NJ*	Northeast	11,933,690	143
3	Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV*	South	5,034,156	119
4	Boston, MA	Northeast	2,024,981	152
5	Philadelphia, PA*	Northeast	2,142,440	104
6	Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI	Midwest	3,693,729	97
7	Frederick-Gaithersburg-Rockville, MD	South	1,339,600	140
8	Nashville-Davidson-Murfreesboro-Franklin, TN	South	2,046,828	97
9	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Glendale, CA*	West	9,721,138	153
10	New Orleans-Metairie, LA	South	1,246,176	96
11	Cincinnati, OH-KY-IN	Midwest	2,265,051	93
12	Cleveland-Elyria, OH	Midwest	2,063,132	93
13	Cambridge-Newton-Framingham, MA*	Northeast	2,423,870	141
14	Denver-Aurora-Lakewood, CO	West	2,985,871	106
15	Pittsburgh, PA	Northeast	2,349,172	101
16	Portland-Vancouver-Hillsboro, OR-WA	West	2,509,489	118
17	Seattle-Bellevue-Everett, WA*	West	3,106,868	150
18	Milwaukee-Waukesha, WI	Midwest	1,559,792	98
19	Chicago-Naperville-Arlington Heights, IL*	Midwest	7,091,738	119
20	St. Louis, MO-IL	Midwest	2,801,319	86

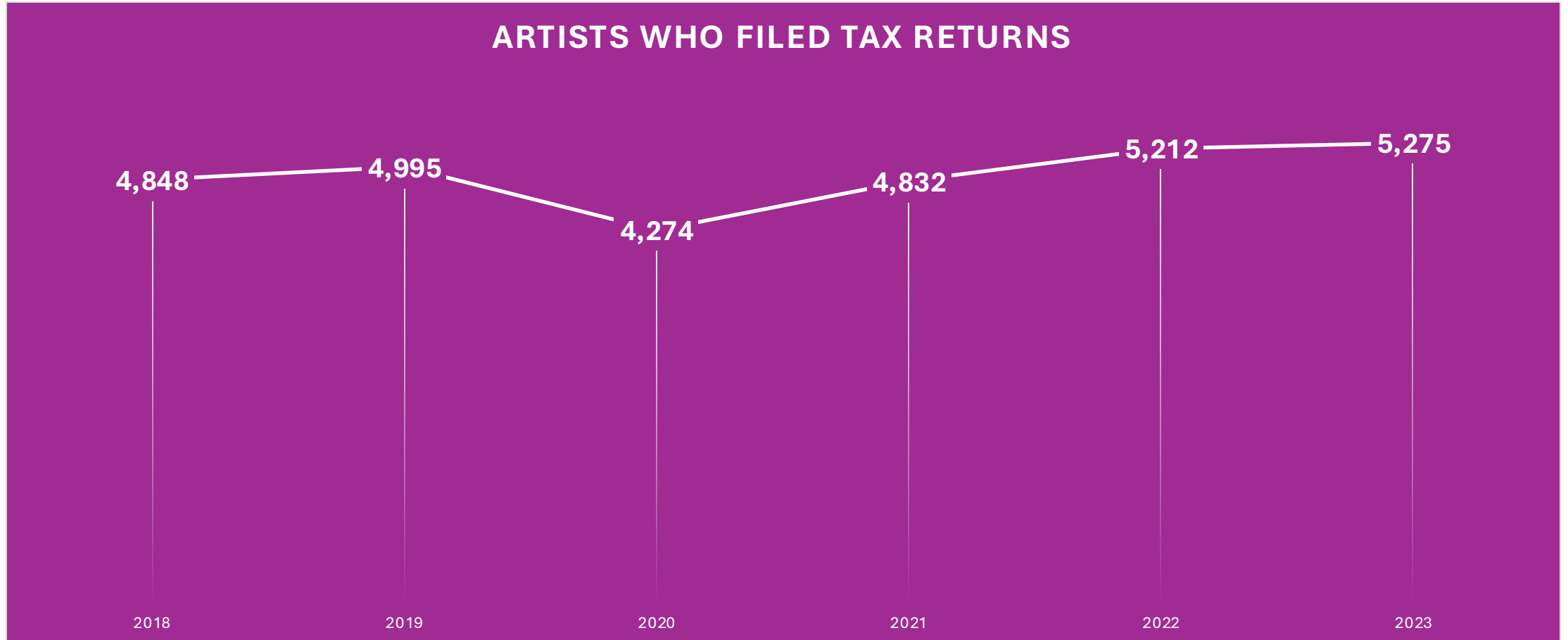
Defining Nonemployer

- Per the US Census,
“A nonemployer business is one that has no paid employees, has annual business receipts of \$1,000 or more (\$1 or more in the Construction industry), and is subject to federal income taxes.”
 - Industries based on the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS)
 - For DataArts, they chose the metropolitan statistical area including the 13 counties outside of STL using 711510
 - For this presentation, it's only St. Louis City and County included with the following NAICS codes of :
 - 7111: Performing Arts Companies
 - 7115: Independent Artists, Writers, and Performers

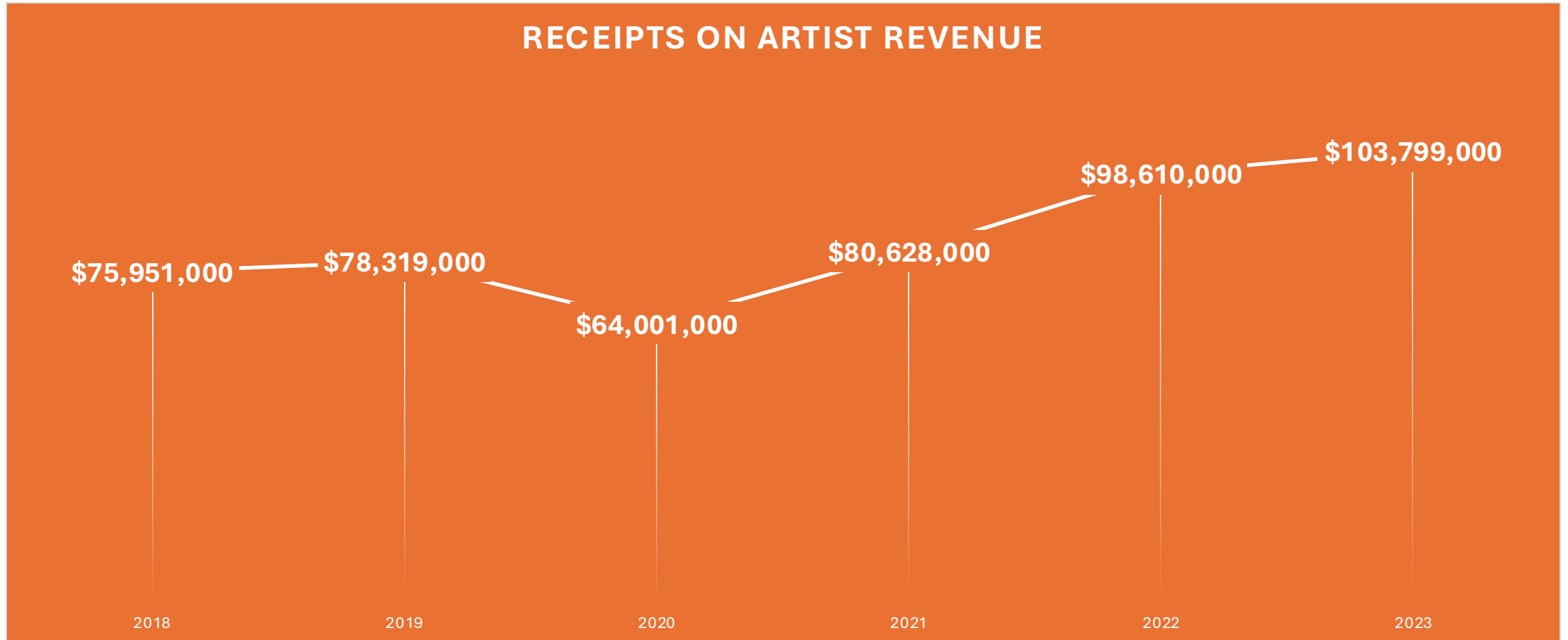
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "Nonemployer Statistics: Glossary, Census.gov, accessed June 23, 2025.

Source: SMU DataArts, National Center for Arts Research. (2023). *Arts Vibrancy Index 2023: The Economic and Social Impact Study of the Nation's Nonprofit Arts and Culture Industry*.

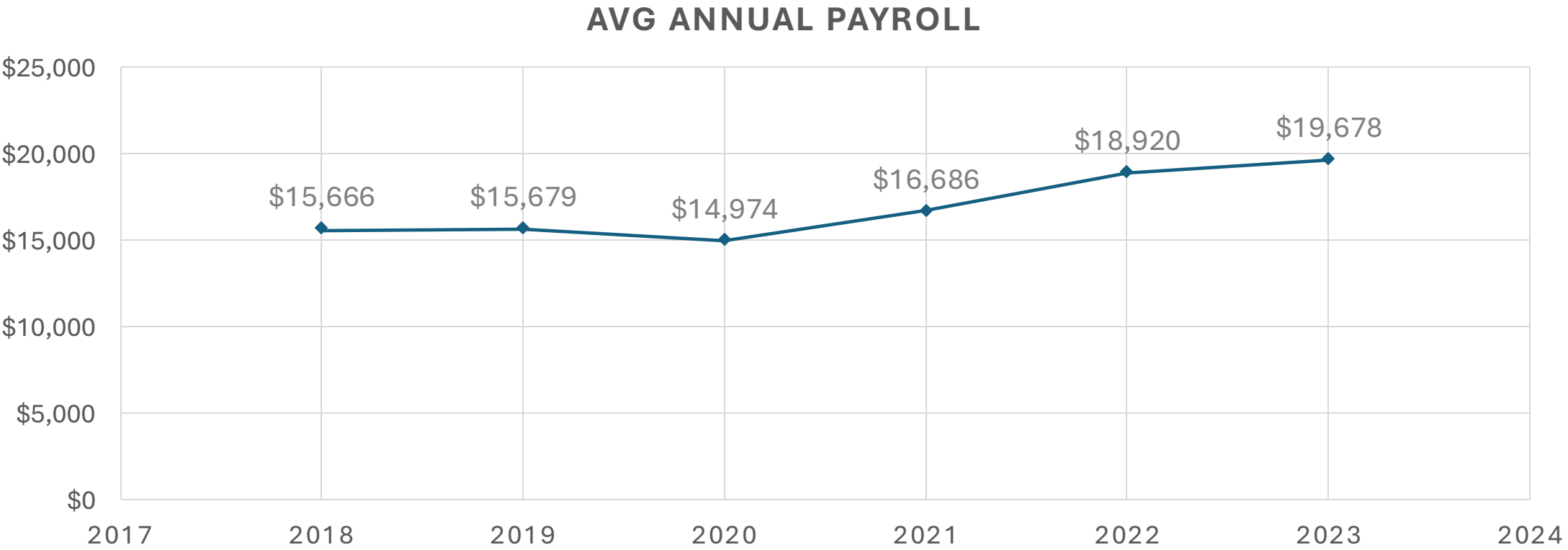
STL Trends: Number of Artists



STL Trends: How Much Artists Earned

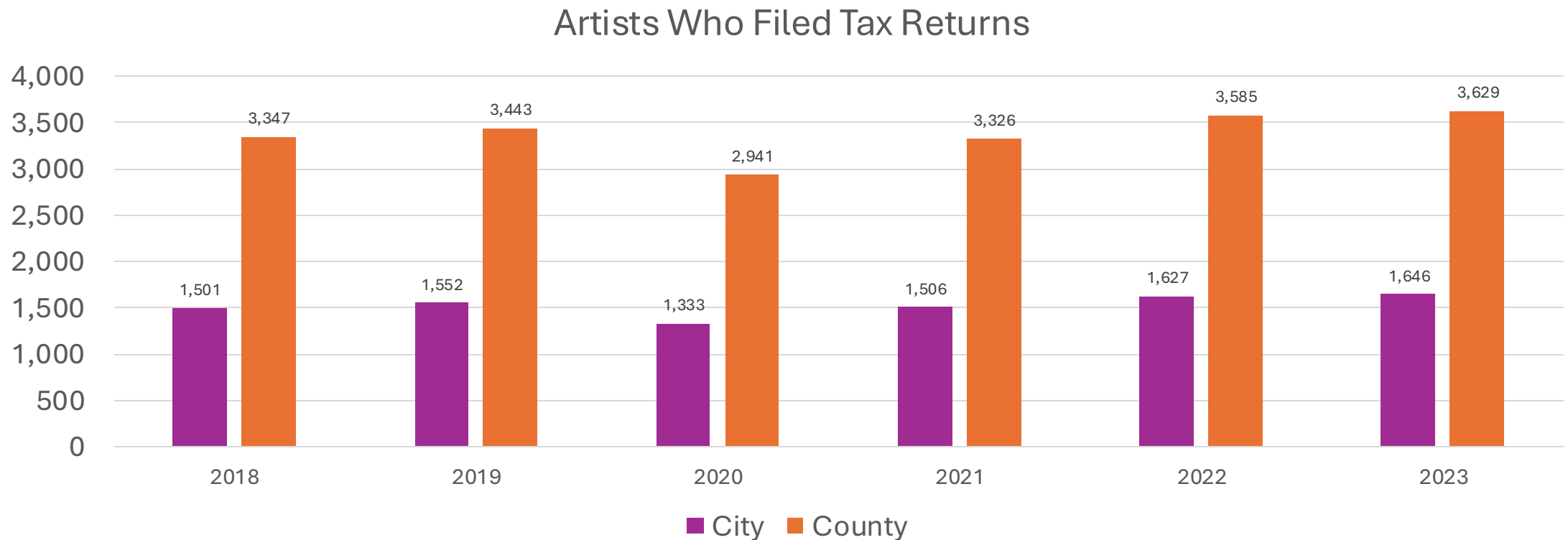


STL Trends: How Much Artists Earned on Average

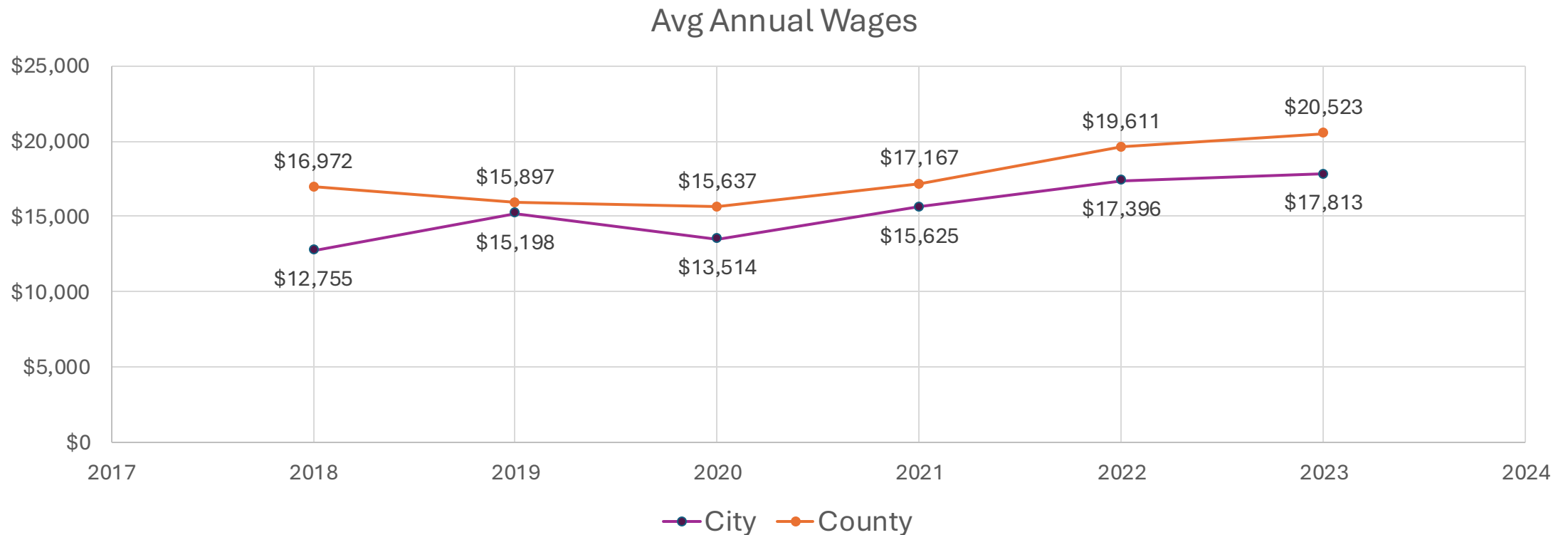


Compiled & Analyzed by Mk Sadiq. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "Nonemployer Statistics, Census.gov, accessed June 23, 2025.

City & County Divide: Filed Taxes



City & County Divide: Avg Wages



Occupational & Employment Wage Statistics

The Bureau of Labor Statistics and state workforce agency produce a recurring report that estimates the number of employees in an industry.

Data for the St. Louis region includes over thirty creative industries plus sports-related industries.

We'll use this data to learn the number of employed creatives as surveyed by employers.

Employment & Wage Data for STL MSA

	2018	2021	2024
Number of Employees	12,490	12,570	11,720
Avg Hourly Wage	\$23.93	\$23.35	\$28.54

Top five occupations by avg hourly wage

1. Art Directors | \$49.45/hr
2. Musicians and Singers | \$45.22/hr
3. Fashion Designers | \$43.39
4. Commercial and Industrial designers | \$43.02
5. Media & Communication Equipment Workers | \$41.08

Bottom five occupations by avg hourly wage

1. Floral Designers | \$16.44
2. Merchandise Displayers and Window Trimmers | \$19.17
3. Fine Artists, Including Painters, Sculptors, and Illustrators | \$22.06
4. Photographers | \$22.73
5. Set and Exhibit Designers | \$25.71

*There are several occupations where average hourly wage data were not available for the report at the time such as craft artists, dancers, and broadcasters-radio DJs.

More on RAC Applicant Data

- In 2018, RAC collected data from 116 arts organizations with expenditures that ranged from \$6,929 to \$30.3 million dollars.
- Yet, with such range, only 6 organizations reported paying \$0.00 to local artists.
- The remaining 110 organizations paid 7,288 artists \$19.5 million.
- Average local artist compensation ranged from the gig honorarium level of \$23 for a performance to \$54,449 for a year.

RAC Applicant Data

