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# What Female Artists Can Do About Discrimination



By [Henrich Greve](#) , INSEAD

## **Participation in residency programmes and access to elite education can enhance the opportunities available to women artists.**

Being an artist isn't easy. It takes a long time for artists to be noticed for their talent and creativity. They usually only sell their art in small galleries at first, and their early success might only happen in their own country or local area.

To make matters worse, discrimination persists in the art world, particularly against female artists who often encounter the undervaluation of their work. One [study](#), using a sample of 1.9 million auction transactions from 1970 to 2016, showed that paintings by female artists sell for 42 percent less compared to similar ones by male artists.

Is there a remedy for such discrimination? This was the question that [Jung-Yun Han](#) (National Taiwan University), my INSEAD colleague [Andrew Shipilov](#) and I sought to address using 15 years of data on Korean artists and their exhibitions abroad.

While we discovered that female artists were indeed less successful in exhibiting abroad, we were chiefly interested in identifying factors in their careers that might mitigate or eliminate this disadvantage. Indeed, we did find two such factors.

### **Residency programmes and elite education**

For many artists, a key step in their careers is a residency stay. Aside from access to a shared workspace, artists-in-residence get to interact with other junior and senior creatives, which helps them gain inspiration and advice. They also benefit from networking opportunities with important outsiders such as curators and journalists. The purpose of residencies is to help artists succeed, but to our surprise, this was only true for female artists.

Similarly, an education in an elite art school, known for providing top-notch technical training and artistic appreciation, proved to be more beneficial for female artists than for male ones. The positive effect was also more long-lasting than that of a residency stay.

### **Social networks**

What accounts for these findings? Social networks play a significant role, and a solid professional network is especially important for individuals who would otherwise be unjustly devalued by others. Residency programmes and elite schools connect artists with individuals who can offer guidance on approaching galleries and even provide direct contacts.

We found that the residency network effect was most effective for women when it was populated by many other women. This suggests that it is not just peers, but same-gender supportive peers who generate the effect. However, the effect was fairly short-lived and peaked within a year of residency.

The disparity in benefits between male and female artists can be attributed to the fact that female artists often have more to prove, and therefore derive greater benefit from network ties. By being exposed to diverse artworks created by peers who have experience in both domestic and foreign markets, female artists can relax concerns about rejection from foreign galleries and not give up.

These findings offer practical guidance for supporting women's success in the art world. They likely extend to other forms of entrepreneurship and work. Policymakers should consider the potential of residency programmes

as cost-effective measures to enhance gender equality in the fine arts. Such programmes not only amplify the visibility of female artists in international exhibitions but also likely contribute to increased exports of artwork, thus fostering greater recognition and representation of women in the art world.

#### **Find article at**

<https://knowledge.insead.edu/entrepreneurship/what-female-artists-can-do-about-discrimination>

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#### **About the author(s)**

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#### **About the research**

**"The liability of gender? Constraints and enablers of foreign market entry for female artists"** is published in the *Journal of International Business Studies*.

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#### **About the series**

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