

ARTISTIC LABOUR, CLASS AND GENDER IN CONTEMPORARY SERBIA: A CASE STUDY^a

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Abstract

In this paper, I focus on the value of artistic labour in relation to class and gender positions under capitalism, as well as the conditions of its performance in present-day Serbia. Drawing on critical theory, I outline the historical coordinates within which this relation was shaped in the modern era. Artistic labour is constituted as an immanently purposive aesthetic practice structurally resistant to external demands—moral, political, or economic—and thus positioned in opposition to the broader socio-economic order. As a result, its economic valuation is severed from that of ‘productive labour’ in capitalism, compelling artists to sustain their practice through alternative means. One consequence of this divide is privileged access to creativity by dominant social groups. Additionally, gendered disparities in income, visibility, and recognition reveal how women artists are disproportionately affected, reinforcing existing cultural hierarchies. These theses are examined through data collected via an online survey conducted in Serbia in 2023.

Key words: artistic labour, productive labour, class, gender, capitalism.

УМЕТНИЧКИ РАД, КЛАСА И РОД У САВРЕМЕНОЈ СРБИЈИ: СТУДИЈА СЛУЧАЈА

Апстракт

У овом раду фокусираћу се на уметнички рад у његовој релацији са класним и родним позицијама са којих се обавља у капитализму, посебно у савременим условима у Србији. Ослањајући се на критичку теорију, изложићу историјске координате унутар којих се ова релација формира у модерном добу, када се уметнички рад дефинише као иманентно сврховита естетска пракса која се структурно опира спољашњим захтевима, било моралним, политичким или економским. Тиме се његово економско вредновање одваја од вредновања 'продуктивног рада' у

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капитализму, а уметници су принуђени да своје стваралаштво одрже другим средствима. Једна од последица тог расцепа јесте привилегован приступ стваралаштву виших друштвених слојева и доминантних идентитетских група. Родна асиметрија у приходима и препознатљивости посебно погађа жене, репродукујући постојеће хијерархије у културном пољу. Наведене тезе биће размотрене кроз податке сакупљене у склопу истраживања спроведеног у Србији путем онлајн упитника током 2023. године.

Кључне речи: уметнички рад, продуктивни рад, класа, род, капитализам.

INTRODUCTION

Artistic creation is typically not seen as labour in the conventional sense. Instead, it is framed through notions like creativity, genius, inspiration, talent, play, and freedom, concepts often disconnected from labour in capitalist contexts. While recent decades have seen some overlap between these categories, this convergence, as others have argued, calls for critical examination rather than utopian celebration (Bradić, 2024, pp. 70–75). The distinction between labour and artistic creation is not natural or self-evident, but the result of historical developments marked by enduring contradictions. A conceptual bridge between these domains can be found in Hegel's understanding of labour in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*: "work forms and shapes the thing. The negative relation to the object becomes its form and something permanent" (Hegel, 1979, p. 118). This definition points to a broad understanding of labour that includes both artistic and non-artistic forms. My focus lies in how modern capitalist societies, structured by productive rationality, have shaped this terrain. Drawing on the labour theory of value in its dialectical-materialist form, I explore how the divide between artistic and conventional labour is socially produced and how this divide obscures shared structural constraints. Specifically, I examine how artistic labour, though often considered beyond capitalist production, is nonetheless structured by its logic—and how these structures are further inflected by gendered relations. By addressing how gender shapes access to visibility, remuneration, and legitimacy in the field of art, I seek to uncover the ways in which the cultural valorisation of artistic labour is unevenly distributed and sustained by broader systems of inequality.

These reflections are grounded in empirical data from a 2023 survey on artistic labour in Serbia, focused on valuation, working conditions, and mediators in the literary and visual arts. The findings offer insight into how the contradictions outlined above are experienced in practice, anchoring the analysis in local conditions while speaking to global dynamics of art and labour under capitalism.

METHODOLOGY

As Marxist analysis shows, capitalist commodity production is not oriented toward satisfying needs, but toward the valorisation of value (Heinrich, 2004, p. 87). Surplus value can only be produced by labour power (Marx, 1982, p. 270), which compels capitalists to rent it from workers who must sell it to survive. Through this process, capitalists appropriate the surplus generated by labourers, governed by the logic of market competition. This labour is termed ‘productive’ and is contractually structured so that capitalists claim the worker’s time, energy, objectives, and products. In this way, labour becomes ‘really subsumed’ under capital—not merely distinct from pre-capitalist forms, but entirely restructured to meet capitalist imperatives (Heinrich, 2004, p. 118). The result is profound alienation—from the product, from one’s life-activity, and from one’s species being (Marx, 1988, p. 78).

Feminist theorists like Silvia Federici have insisted that any analysis of labour must also account for social reproduction—largely unwaged, gendered, domestic labour that sustains both life and the conditions for waged labour (Federici, 2012, n.p.). While underdeveloped in Marx’s core framework, domestic labour is not absent from his critique. In *Capital*, Marx notes that the cost of reproducing labour-power includes maintaining not just the worker, but their family (Marx, 1988, p. 275). He also observes that capitalism pushes all family members into the labour market, thereby reducing the value of labour-power and intensifying exploitation across the board. This shift, he writes, replaces not only children’s play but also independent domestic labour within the family (p. 517). Crucially, Marx’s formulation refers to household labour as customary, and therefore historically contingent and subject to change. If the conditions of productive labour have changed historically while the ‘customary limits’ of domestic labour have remained relatively stable, attention must be given to the gendered dynamics of labour-power reproduction. This includes the ideological and material devaluation of feminised labour. As Federici notes, reproduction here extends beyond value exchange to include care, emotional labour, domestic work, and education—typically performed by women and systemically marginalised.

Artistic labour, in this framework, contrasts with both productive and reproductive labour, and is considered ‘unproductive.’ Yet in all these spheres, work still ‘forms and shapes the thing’ and generates value, whether financial or aesthetic. Artistic and reproductive labour share a common exclusion from formal recognition, but differ structurally: while reproductive labour is *essential yet unrecognised*, artistic labour *constitutes itself* as ‘unproductive,’ positioned deliberately outside the structural logic of capital. This idea of artistic labour as autonomous and not subsumable under capital stems from theoretical and poetic shifts between the late 18th and 19th centuries. In this period, art came to be seen as immanently pur-

positive and autonomous, serving as labour's 'other' within capitalism. Hence, Fredric Jameson suggests that "art or the aesthetic ... offered the closest accessible analogy to, constituted the most adequate symbolic experience of, a nonalienated labor otherwise unimaginable for us" (Jameson, 1991, p. 146).

Yet the autonomisation of artistic labour never fully frees it from capitalist production; instead, it gains only a limited autonomy. This becomes clear when considering the material conditions under which art circulates. For a literary text to reach readers, it must be transformed, printed or digitised, and mediated by someone who delivers it to an audience. In this process, the writer becomes a seller, treating the text as a commodity. At the same time the writer does not sell directly to readers but to an intermediary—the capitalist (e.g., a publisher)—who manages distribution. As Dave Beech aptly notes, "art encounters capital not at the point of production, but through the art market's systems of distribution" (Beech, 2015, p. 21). The artist–capitalist relationship is thus central to transforming artistic value into exchange value and defining the structural role of the artist. Artistic labour, while not 'really subsumed' like productive labour, is 'formally subsumed' under capital, shaped by its institutional and market frameworks (see Heinrich, 2004, p. 118). This creates a core contradiction: in its creative phase, artistic work resists economic logic to assert autonomy; yet, in distribution, it relies on that very logic for circulation, recognition, and compensation. Mediating institutions define the position, function, and influence of art, and become the basis of its concrete autonomy. Pierre Bourdieu refers to this arrangement as the "subfield of restricted production" (Bourdieu, 1995, p. 217).

Even this notion of limited artistic autonomy is historically *gendered*: only those recognised as political subjects could fully claim autonomy, obscuring the material dependencies shaping actual artistic production—especially for women. Women's access to artistic labour has long been constrained by institutional exclusion and the gendered split between public (artistic) and private (domestic) spheres (Nochlin, 1988, p. 176; Pollock, 2008, p. 12-13). Even when women participated in artistic production, their work was often framed as an extension of reproductive roles, intuitive, emotional, decorative, rather than critical or autonomous (Nochlin, 1988, p. 155, 171). Thus, the idea of artistic autonomy rests on numerous preconditions, including invisible forms of support such as unpaid female labour, domestic care, and emotional maintenance.

These tensions between autonomy and dependency become especially salient when considering the average position of an artist, rather than celebrated exceptions who capitalise on the contradictions of the field. Flaubert famously captures this paradox: "We are workers of luxury; thus nobody is rich enough to pay us. When you want to earn money with your pen, you have to do journalism, serials, or the theatre" (Flaubert, qtd. in

Bourdieu, 1995, p. 82). Artists who assert their distinctiveness from standard labour practices are thus excluded from the very mechanisms that determine labour's value, making them structurally incapable of securing even minimal reproduction—an exclusion that affects artists of all genders.

Since artistic value must be determined somehow, it ultimately hinges on the decisions of mediators and capitalists. As Olav Velthuis shows in *Talking Prices* (2007), art dealers rely on 'pricing scripts' to set prices systematically, avoiding the subjective question of quality by emphasising measurable traits such as artwork size or the artist's age (Velthuis, 2007, p. 8). These scripts are informally coordinated within the art market, with value based on factors like reputation and dimensions—easier to quantify than artistic merit—thereby making economic valuation in the arts appear more transparent (p. 118–120). This valuation system produces sharp asymmetries: a few artists attain visibility and commercial success, while most face precarious conditions. Research supports this: artists often work longer hours, earn less than other workers, juggle employment in both arts and non-arts sectors, and frequently live below the poverty line (Towse, 1996, pp. 98–99). To survive, they must conduct productive labour up to a 'subsistence' point, making artistic labour supplementary, pursued outside standard working hours and financed by other waged work. As a result, artistic labour becomes an extension of the working day, viable only when coupled with another income. Artists must thus become a dual figure: artist-patrons, artist-labourers, artist-managers, and so forth. This duality is not a personal failing but the *structural condition* of average artistic labour under capitalism.

One can assert that questions of class and identity become crucially relevant at this juncture. If artistic labour can only occur after one's survival has been secured through other means, those already in possession of capital or social privilege are materially advantaged. As Veblen's concept of the 'leisure class' suggests, non-remunerative cultural production aligns with economic surplus. Thus, the art world reflects and reproduces dominant class and gender hierarchies, because they constitute socio-economic positions which enable participation and shield from precarity. Even when artistic content resists commodification or gender norms, its reproduction and distribution remain shaped by capitalist and patriarchal structures. Art institutions—museums, galleries, publishers—are in the hands of those who belong to the dominant class and identitarian constructs, favourable to its interests. Therefore, most artists must perform their labour under conditions that obscure its value, marginalise its social use, and displace it outside of recognised economic and temporal relations.

Recent data confirms these systemic inequalities. From 2008 to 2019, only 2% of \$196.6 billion in auction sales went to women artists (Halperin & Burns, 2019). In the U.S., women artists earn 80 cents for every dollar earned by men (NEA, 2022). Although the UK's arts sector

reportedly has one of the lowest median gender pay gaps (Taysom, 2022), Helen Gorrill's *Women Can't Paint* (2020) reveals stark disparities: among the top 100 bestselling paintings in British auctions (1992–2014), only 14% were by women, with value gaps reaching 93%. Her analysis, though focused on highly successful artists, reveals a systemic devaluation of women's work and entrenched market mechanisms that privilege masculinity in assigning artistic worth (Gorrill, 2020, p. 51–72). In addition to these insights, my study aims to shed light on the average conditions of artistic labour, where these structural inequalities persist in more diffuse forms.

Research from Serbia highlights stark gender disparities in pay and the valuation of women's labour in culture and the arts. Women in the arts typically work under precarious, resource-scarce conditions and often face hostile environments (Nenić & Nikolić, 2022, p. 134). Much of their labour remains unpaid, including administrative tasks, grant writing, and reporting. Though women are the majority in the public cultural sector, they remain underrepresented in leadership and face harsher scrutiny than male peers (Milanović, Subašić & Opačić, 2017, p. 202). Gender pay gaps persist, especially in the independent scene and lucrative creative industries like IT, where women are still marginalised (Mikić, 2020). The 2023 study *Rod i rad u kulturnom polju u Srbiji* by Cvetičanin, Nikolić, and Bobićić offers an in-depth account of these inequalities, showing that structural precarity affects all cultural workers but impacts women more severely. Many women are freelancers without stable contracts or protection, exposed to economic insecurity and burnout. Independent initiatives, where women are more active, lack systemic support, worsening gender inequities. Political interference, weak labour protections, and an underdeveloped cultural market reinforce a gendered economy that limits women's access to leadership, sustainability, and recognition (Cvetičanin, Nikolić & Bobićić, 2023, p. 28–40).

SURVEY AND RESULTS

To examine how the value of artistic labour – its supplementary nature and intersections with class and gender – materialises in practice, this study draws on original quantitative data from an online survey conducted in Serbia in 2023. The structured questionnaire included seven thematic sections covering socio-demographics, income, and the valuation of artistic and non-artistic work. This analysis focuses on the first two sections, 'Background' and 'Artistic Labour and Value,' which provide insight into the respondents' social position and economic engagement. The sampling strategy combined targeted outreach with broad dissemination. The survey was shared directly with artists via email and messaging platforms and promoted through paid ads on Facebook and Instagram, targeting users with cultural interests. Although participation was voluntary, anonymous, and

self-selected, this mixed method aimed to ensure diversity and mitigate some selection bias. While not probabilistic, the use of standardised, non-leading questions supports the dataset's internal validity and allows for a cautious interpretation of trends.

Of the 107 completed questionnaires, 16 were excluded due to non-affiliation with literary or visual arts. The final sample includes 91 respondents: 28 in literature and 63 in visual arts. Gender distribution was notably uneven: 69 women, 21 men, one gender-divergent person, and one non-respondent (Table 1). It remains unclear whether this reflects broader demographic patterns in the Serbian cultural field or results from self-selection, with certain groups (e.g., women visual artists) more likely to participate.

Table 1. Respondents by Gender and Artistic Practice

| Gender | Literature | Visual Arts | Total |
|------------------|------------|-------------|-------|
| Women | 17 | 51 | 68 |
| Men | 10 | 11 | 21 |
| Gender-divergent | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| N/A | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 28 | 63 | 91 |

The age distribution of the survey respondents, as shown in the Table 2, includes participants from multiple generations. The sample is primarily composed of individuals in the 20–59 age range, with fewer respondents aged 60 and above. One participant did not provide age information. This distribution offers insight into artistic labour and economic conditions across various stages of professional life.

Table 2. Age Distribution of Survey Respondents

| Age group | |
|-----------|----|
| 20-29 | 19 |
| 30-39 | 14 |
| 40-49 | 23 |
| 50-59 | 21 |
| 60-69 | 8 |
| 70-79 | 4 |
| N/A | 1 |

Nonetheless, several methodological limitations must be acknowledged. First, given the voluntary nature of participation and the survey's online dissemination through channels likely to attract individuals already engaged or networked within cultural sectors, the sample is subject to self-selection bias. This may result in the overrepresentation of more digitally literate, professionally active, or thematically aligned individuals. Second, the relatively modest sample size—particularly when disaggregated by

gender and artistic discipline—limits the generalisability of the findings and constrains the application of more complex statistical analyses. These limitations necessitate caution in extrapolating the findings to the broader population of artists in Serbia. Nonetheless, the dataset provides a valuable exploratory snapshot of structural disparities and economic conditions within the cultural field, and lays important groundwork for more systematic, representative research in the future.

Average Monthly Income

I will start my analysis by discussing the responses from the second section, which were gathered in answer to the question, “What is your average monthly income?” According to the data collected, the respondents’ monthly income ranges from 0 to 360,000 RSD, with an overall mean of 62,028 RSD (Table 3). This figure is well below the national average for 2023, which, according to the Republic Statistical Office, was 86,007 RSD, excluding taxes and contributions (Republički zavod za statistiku, 2023). However, it is nearly double the minimum monthly wage for the same year, which was 36,800 RSD. It is important to note that this data pertains to the non-artistic, regular employment of the respondents, which still falls below the national average. When considering demographic and disciplinary variables, the distribution changes significantly.

Regarding gender, the minimum monthly incomes may vary, with men earning around 20,000 RSD, while women reported minimum of 0 RSD. On the other hand, the maximum monthly income for men is 120,000 RSD, whereas for women it reaches 360,000 RSD. The average monthly income for men is 68,250 RSD and for women 53,678 RSD, so still neither group reaches the national average, although men appear to be significantly closer (Table 3). These figures indicate substantial gender disparities in earnings, as well as considerable variations within gender groups, potentially reflecting broader social and economic inequalities in the fields where the respondents are employed, along with different structures of opportunity and access across genders.

An analysis of monthly income by artistic discipline also reveals notable variations between writers and visual artists. The minimum income in both disciplines is 0 RSD, however, the maximum incomes differ significantly: writers can earn up to 150,000 RSD per month, while visual artists may earn up to 360,000 RSD, suggesting that visual artists have a higher potential for significant earnings compared to writers. The data reveals notable gender disparities in average monthly income within both artistic disciplines examined. In the field of literature, male respondents reported an average monthly income of 67,428 RSD, while female respondents reported 64,375 RSD, indicating a relatively modest gender gap. In contrast, the disparity is significantly more pronounced in the visual arts: men reported an average of 68,889 RSD, compared to only 48,289 RSD

for women—a difference of over 20,000 RSD. When considering overall averages by discipline, writers earn an average of 65,902 RSD per month, while visual artists earn 58,589 RSD (Table 3). These figures suggest that although income differences between genders exist in both fields, they are especially stark within the visual arts, pointing to deeper structural inequalities in how male and female artists are remunerated for their non-artistic labour. At the same time, this data suggests that although visual artists may achieve higher maximum earnings, writers tend to earn a higher average monthly income.

Table 3. Monthly Income

| | Minimum monthly income for literature | Minimum monthly income for the visual arts | Average monthly income for literature | Average monthly income for the visual arts | Average monthly income for the overall | Maximum monthly income for literature | Maximum monthly income for the visual arts |
|---------|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|--|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| Men | 25,000 | 20,000 | 67,428 | 68,889 | 68,250 | 80,000 | 120,000 |
| Women | 0 | 0 | 64,375 | 48,289 | 53,678 | 150,000 | 360,000 |
| Overall | 0 | 0 | 65,902 | 58,589 | 61,099 | 150,000 | 360,000 |

Range of Prices

However, in order to assess the proportion of income received for artistic labour alone within their average monthly income it is necessary to consider the remuneration they receive specifically from their artistic work. This is why I posed them the following question: “What is the range of prices of your artworks?” Most of the respondents provided their lowest and highest sums, which I have compiled here to calculate the overall averages. But firstly, let us consider the whole range of the estimated monetary value of individual works, as it is remarkably wide, especially when disciplinary divisions are not considered, spanning from 100 RSD to 740,000 RSD.

Given the significant disciplinary differences, I will present the data from that perspective. In literature it becomes clear that the gap between the minimum and maximum remuneration is much smaller, ranging from 400 to 60,000 RSD, with the *average* remuneration range within the discipline being even narrower, from 683 to 18,325 RSD. When comparing the earnings of men and women within this field, the average range for men is from 470 RSD to 48,840 RSD, while for women it is from 788 RSD to 7,087 RSD, reflecting, once again, a significant gender gap. Even when considering the median, the range for men is from 500 to 1,000 RSD, while for women it is from 600 to 675 RSD (Table 4).

In addition to the pronounced gender gap, these figures suggest that when responding to questions about the price of their works, writers may have conflated the price of individual books—which fits within the stated

median range and was explicitly mentioned in comments left in the survey—with the total fee for a manuscript or the percentage of sales revenue. In other words, when asked about the price of an artistic work, the respondents seem to be uncertain whether the question refers to the price at which their books are sold in bookstores or the remuneration they receive from publishers for writing and publishing them, an issue which seems to persist throughout the survey.

In the case of the visual arts, given that the overall price range for individual works spans from 100 RSD to 740,000 RSD, it is evident that it encompasses the full spectrum under discussion. The average range, however, is somewhat narrower, from 16,344 RSD to 282,448 RSD. The gender division is as follows: for men, the average range is from 22,500 RSD to 480,000 RSD, while for women, it is from 15,300 RSD to 251,332 RSD, practically indicating a 2:1 ratio in favour of men. The median figures differ significantly, with the range for men being from 18,000 RSD to 160,000 RSD, and for women from 6,000 RSD to 120,000 RSD, which indicates that even within the field with higher possible remunerations, only a small number of artists ever reach the upper end of its spectrum (Table 4). It also has to be noted that due to the often unique status of artworks in visual arts, there is no overlap between different types of remuneration, and it is therefore clear that the prices of works created by women are significantly lower than those created by men.

Table 4. Range of Prices

| | | Average minimum price | Average maximum price | Median minimum price | Median maximum price |
|---------|-------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Men | Literature | 470 | 48,840 | 500 | 1000 |
| | Visual Arts | 22,500 | 480,000 | 18,000 | 160,000 |
| Women | Literature | 788 | 7,087 | 600 | 675 |
| | Visual Arts | 15,300 | 251,332.6 | 6,000 | 120,000 |
| Overall | | 12,496 | 220,243.4 | 4,300 | 60,000 |

Average Annual Artistic Income

As previously noted, the rhythm of artistic labour is uneven and unpredictable, given its resistance to capitalist productivity dynamic, and therefore I did not take the mentioned remunerations as stable or consistent. Instead, I asked respondents directly about their total average annual earnings from artistic labour in a formulation: “How much, on average, do you make from your art, per year?” This way I could compare the actual income to both the stated prices of their works as well as to their average monthly income. The overall average across both disciplines is approximately 64,118 RSD. However, as disciplinary differences are once again substantial, I will proceed to present the data through their lens.

In literature, men who reported higher prices for individual works than women now reported earning 2,600 RSD on average over the course of a year, while women reported earning approximately 45,235 RSD (Table 5). This presents an almost inverse situation compared to the previous question, where women, who had reported significantly lower prices for their work, now report considerably higher earnings than men. This could, for instance, suggest that women have more work opportunities in literature due to the supposed lower price of their labour, however, it is also possible that this discrepancy reflects once again a conflation between fees for manuscripts and/or public appearances and income from the sale of individual books, with women reporting the former and men the latter. Based on the data alone, it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions regarding the cause of this disparity.

Conversely, in the visual arts, men report earning an average of 165,333 RSD annually, while women report an average of 64,604 RSD (Table 5). If we take into account the stated price of their individual works, this suggests that men sell between 7 lower-priced works per year to 1 higher-priced work every three years, while women sell between 3 lower-priced works per year to 1 higher-priced work every four years to achieve the reported averages. It would seem that these numbers imply that women on average sell their works less often and for smaller sums than men. The median is here also notable, at 0 RSD for men and 11,000 RSD for women, which is considerably lower than the arithmetic mean, indicating a wide range of income disparities among visual artists regardless of gender (Table 5).

The data on maximum average annual artistic income reveals sharp disparities across gender and discipline, but these high figures reflect singular outliers rather than general trends—something clearly indicated by the collected responses. Among male visual artists, the highest reported income is 780,000 RSD annually, while for female visual artists it is 360,000 RSD. In literature, the maximum for women is 600,000 RSD, whereas male writers reported a maximum of just 20,000 RSD (Table 5). These values, when contrasted with the significantly lower average incomes reported in each group, confirm that only individual respondents achieved such levels of income. Moreover, all groups and disciplines reported a minimum annual income of 0 RSD, demonstrating that many artists received no compensation at all for their artistic labour.

When these earnings are compared with the average and minimum monthly wages at the national level (86,007 RSD and 36,800 RSD, respectively), it becomes clear that these incomes are exceedingly low. When the total average annual earnings of artists are divided by 12 months, the result is only 5,343 RSD per month, which is not only far below the national average but also far below the minimum wage, and it is evident that this income cannot, in any way, provide for the material livelihood of artists. In

the overall average monthly income of the respondents (64,118 RSD) this amount participates at about 8%.

Table 5. Average Annual Artistic Income

| | | Minimum Average Annual Artistic Income | Average Annual Artistic Income | Median Annual Artistic Income | Maximum Average Annual Artistic Income |
|---------|-------------|---|---|--|---|
| Men | Literature | 0 | 2,600 | 0 | 20,0000 |
| | Visual Arts | 0 | 165,333 | 0 | 780,000 |
| Women | Literature | 0 | 45,235 | 0 | 600,000 |
| | Visual Arts | 0 | 64,604 | 11,000 | 360,000 |
| Overall | | 0 | 64,118 | 0 | 440,000 |

At the same time, when considering the division by discipline and gender, the situation is even more dire. If we are to trust the reported data, the average monthly income for female writers is approximately 3,769 RSD, while for male writers, it is 216 RSD. Even the average monthly income of male visual artists, at around 13,777 RSD, does not approach the minimum wage, nor does that of female visual artists, which stands at 5,383 RSD per month. When considering the median, the situation worsens further, as it is 0 RSD for both groups in literature, as well as for male visual artists, while for female visual artists, it is approximately 916 RSD per month.

I would therefore argue that this data serves as a compelling argument for the thesis of the supplementary nature of artistic labour in both disciplines, where only those with the highest earnings—such as the male visual artist who reported an annual income of 780,000 RSD, translating to a monthly income of 65,000 RSD, or female writer who reported an annual income of 600,000 RSD translating to a monthly income of 50,000 RSD—are able to achieve incomes above the minimum wage, in order to work full time as artists, though even these remain below the national average. In other words, from a societal perspective, *average* income derived from artistic labour cannot be considered sufficient for the bare subsistence of artists, i.e. the ‘reproduction of their labour power.’ Despite notable variations between male and female respondents, as well as between the fields of literature and visual arts, the vast majority of artists remain unable to circumvent the structural mechanisms that compel them to sustain their livelihoods through other forms of productive labour. However, when gender differences in income from non-artistic employment are taken into account (Table 3), it becomes evident that women are, on average and in aggregate, in a more precarious position than their male counterparts. This disparity is especially pronounced in the field of visual arts, where women report significantly lower earnings than men. These differences in non-artistic income further exacerbate existing inequalities and underscore the gendered dimension of economic vulnerability within the cultural sector.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the findings offer empirical support for the paper's theoretical premise: that artistic labour under capitalism is economically devalued, precarious, and *structurally supplementary* to waged work. Only two respondents reported relatively stable income from artistic labour; for the remaining 89, it functioned as an additional or even non-existent source of income. These results highlight the broader economic marginalisation of artists and the failure of the current system to ensure sustainable artistic practice. This condition mirrors the precarious class position of other workers while also exposing persistent gender inequalities. Unequal access to visibility, remuneration, and recognition continues to disadvantage women in the arts, echoing feminist critiques of cultural production. These findings align with Cvetičanin, Nikolić, and Bobićić's analysis of structural gendered imbalances that lead to precarity, underpayment, and burnout (2023, p. 213).

Importantly, such disparities exist within a system where both male and female artists are fundamentally undervalued. In that sense the slightly higher average earnings of male artists reflect not privilege, but rather a familiar capitalist tactic of differentiation within shared exploitation. On this point, I agree with American feminist Sharon Smith, who argues that the economic roots of inequality reveal how seemingly distinct forms of oppression help sustain systems of exploitation: "The special oppression faced by women . . . serves both to lower the living standards of the entire working class and to weaken workers' ability to fight back" (Smith, 2005, p. 160). Her analysis, together with my own, points toward a utopian horizon in which artists, as producers, would control the means of the reproduction and distribution of their work, eliminating material bases for valuation disparities based on gender or identity. However, today this horizon remains distant, if visible at all.

Given present conditions, the alternative lies in collective local struggle—through professional associations and broader democratization of artistic production and distribution. This includes gender-sensitive education, fair compensation, safe working conditions, caregiving support, and institutional protections against discrimination (Cvetičanin et al., 2023, pp. 213–216). It also involves public funding to cover taxes and social contributions for independent artists, and promoting the recognition of art as a public good. Pressure should be placed on intermediaries regarding average fees for artistic labour—introducing professional fee guidelines, though not binding, can reduce exploitation. Finally, state institutions responsible for supporting public cultural work must be held accountable to ensure that public funds are spent transparently and equitably.

Although the current dataset of 91 respondents provides valuable insight into class and gender intersections in the cultural field, future research could further these findings. A larger, more demographically balanced sample would improve representativeness and enable a more de-

tailed analysis, especially of underrepresented groups. While this essay focused on income and structural inequality, the survey also included questions on working time, intermediaries (e.g., publishers, gallerists), and access to project-based funding—important topics that merit further study. All this would not only refine current conclusions but also strengthen the empirical and conceptual basis for long-term advocacy in cultural policy and labour rights.

These are merely temporary reformist interventions that address symptoms rather than the root cause—the exploitation of workers driven by capital accumulation, which extends into all domains and as such threatens to take over, if not entirely erase, art as a vital space of human freedom. But even as such, these interventions still point in the right direction.

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УМЕТНИЧКИ РАД, КЛАСА И РОД У САВРЕМЕНОЈ СРБИЈИ: СТУДИЈА СЛУЧАЈА

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Резиме

Овај рад се бави вредновањем уметничког рада у капитализму, с фокусом на савремену ситуацију у Србији. Приказује се како се уметнички рад разликује од продуктивног и репродуктивног рада, и како та разлика доприноси економској несигурности уметника. Будући да уметници често морају да раде неуметничке послове ради егзистенције, уметнички рад постаје суплементаран у односу на продуктивни. Родна неједнакост додатно отежава положај жена у уметности, које су системски депривилеговане.

Рад користи критичку теорију да објасни историјско раздвајање естетске и економске вредности, као и улогу посредника (издавача, галериста) у вредновању уметности. Теоријски оквир се проверава у истраживању спроведеном у Србији 2023. године, које показује велике родне разлике у приходима, нарочито у визуелној уметности. Иако жене у књижевности бележе нешто више приходе, мушкарци постижу више цене по делу. Укупни приходи свих испитаника далеко су испод минималне цене рада у Србији.

Истраживање потврђује да већина уметника не живи од уметности, већ прибегава другим изворима прихода, што подржава тезу о суплементарности. Рад закључује да културне политике могу ублажити неједнакости, али да се без дубљих системских промена експлоатација наставља. У тим условима, колективна акција уметника и шире социјализација уметности представљају нужан отпор.