Office of Research & Analysis
National Endowment for the Arts
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ACPSA Brief #5: Imports and Exports of Arts and Cultural Goods and Services

The United States exports more arts and cultural goods and services than it imports, resulting in a national trade surplus. Trade surpluses, driven by exports, tend to inject income and jobs into the U.S. economy.[1]

In 1998 through 2005, the U.S. incurred comparatively small trade deficits in arts and cultural services. In 2006, however, that trend reversed when a trade surplus of $2.7 billion was recorded. In the years following, arts and cultural trade surpluses grew sharply, climbing to $25 billion in 2012.

Imports and Exports of Arts and Cultural Goods and Services: 1998-2012

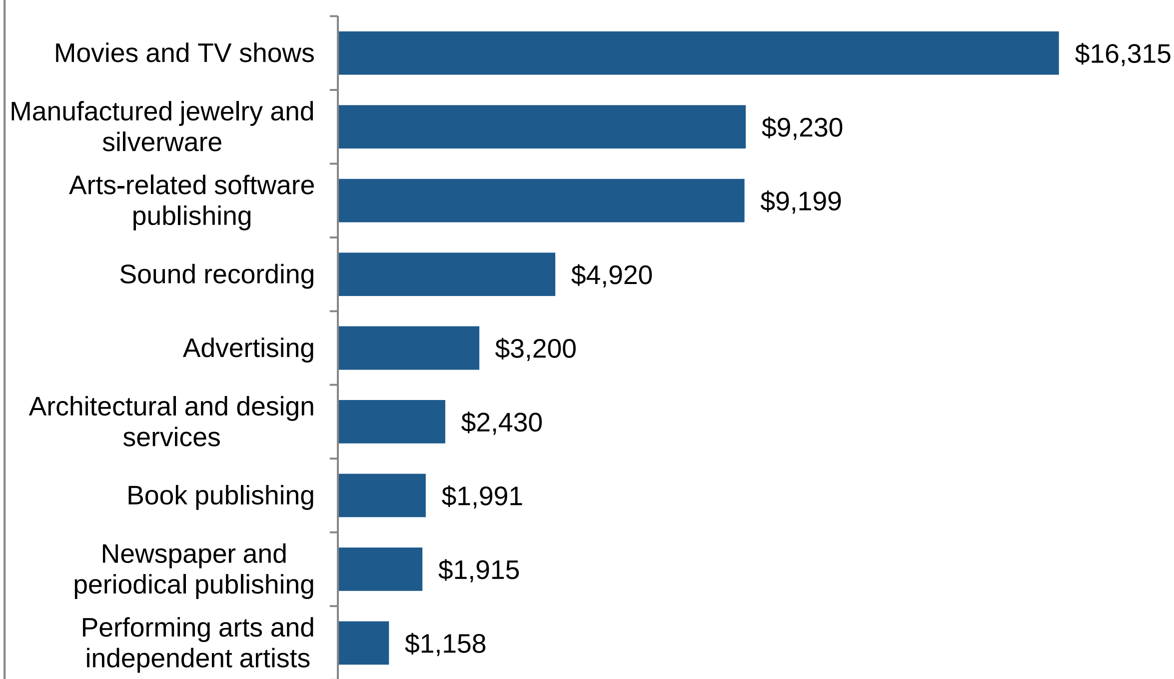
Data source: Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account (ACPSA), U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

[1] This claim assumes all other factors (particularly labor productivity) are held constant.

Trade in arts and cultural goods and services largely reflects the U.S. economy's comparative advantage in ideas-based commodities, sometimes called the "creative economy." For example, ACPSA exports are driven by movies and TV shows, arts-related software publishing (e.g., video games), sound recording, and creative advertising. In 2012, these commodities accounted for more than half of all ACPSA exports.

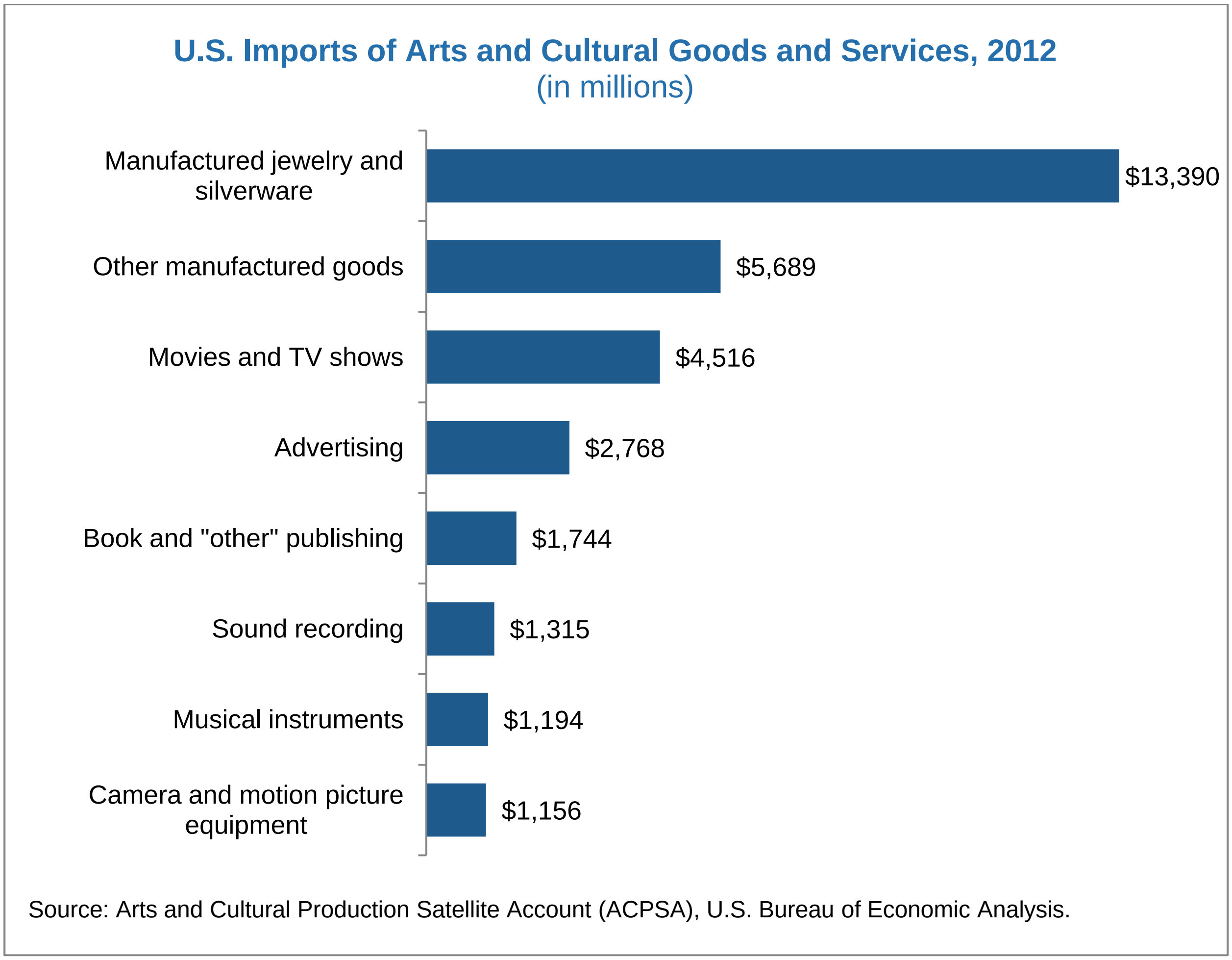
Other notable U.S. exports of arts and cultural goods and services include architectural and design services (which generated $2.4 billion in exports) and the performing arts, a category that includes works by independent artists, including writers (generating nearly $1.2 billion U.S. exports in 2012).

Exports of Arts and Cultural Goods and Services, 2012



Source: Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account, U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Alternatively, manufactured jewelry and silverware and "other" arts-related manufactured goods and services compose the largest share (60 percent in 2012) of arts and cultural imports.[2]



Although exports of arts and cultural goods and services fared better than imports, the worldwide recession of 2009 did have implications for U.S. arts and cultural exports. As the chart below shows, exports of arts and cultural goods and services, as a share of all U.S. exports, generally rose between 1998 and 2007. In 1998, for example, arts and cultural goods and services made up 2.18 percent of U.S. exports—by 2007, that share increased to 3.18 percent.

[2] "Other" arts-related manufactured goods include blown glass, ornamental and architectural metal work, and custom architectural woodwork.

But in 2008 exports of arts and cultural services, relative to all U.S. exports, began slipping—falling to 2.7 percent in 2011 and 2012. This pattern suggests that, all other factors being equal, foreign consumers, coping with their own recessions abroad, curtailed their purchases of U.S. arts and cultural goods and services relative to other U.S. exports.[3]

Source: Arts and Cultural Satellite Account (ACPSA), U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

[3] The International Monetary Fund reports that world GDP, adjusted for inflation, fell by 0.3 percent in 2009; among "advanced' economies," real GDP fell by 3.6 percent in that same year. The advanced economies are: The U.S. and Canada; Great Britain and most European countries; Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and South Korea; and Australia and New Zealand.
For more information about the 2009 world recession, see the IMF's *World Economic Outlook: Crisis and Recovery*, April 2009.