A Network of 'Systematic' Support for Artists
Brooklyn Art Retailer Runs Nonprofit Providing Financial and Professional Support to Artists

Christopher Vroom believes that art is one part of the connective fabric that links communities and people.

The 48-year-old chairman and co-founder of Artspace, an online art retailer, is also the founder and president of the Brooklyn-based nonprofit, Artadia, which was founded in 1997 under a different name. The organization provides a network of social and professional support to artists.

Since 1999, Artadia has awarded more than $3 million in unrestricted grants to visual artists for the purpose of elevating careers and supporting artistic enterprise. The charity has awards programs in five U.S. cities, and Mr. Vroom hopes to expand to other cities abroad.

When an artist receives a grant from Artadia, they are introduced to a much wider audience, with the hope that the artist will receive national exposure. An artist who has been successful in Houston, for example, often doesn't have the reach to get an exhibit in Chicago. Artadia comes in to fill that gap by providing opportunities for artists to get better exposure outside of their home communities.

Part of the service that Artadia offers to institutions is to showcase interesting artistic practices across the country. The organization also hosts some 20 events annually, including a benefit Monday night in New York, that helps link artists to gallery owners, curators and others in the profession.

Mr. Vroom founded Artadia in response to what he says was a fairly obvious problem at the time: There were very few sources of direct support to individual artists.

"I honestly found it a little peculiar that there were so many people engaged and benefiting from so many aspects of the arts ecosystem, yet there were no means to sustain and make viable that ecosystem," he says. Artists needed to be supported in a "systematic" way, he says, and that means not only financial help, but community support, critical evaluation, public validation of work and connections to museums and...
In talking with artists—Mr. Vroom formerly worked in investment banking and art was his personal passion—he says that he came to see artists as educators, mentors and leaders in civic engagement. He feels that "diversity of thinking is really important to nurture."

"The bottom line for me is that art is really important," says Mr. Vroom. "It enriches your life in a significant way and I would like to encourage everyone that has an interest in art to support the maker."

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