

## An Investment in Art

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CHRISTOPHER VROOM is busy handing out grants and personal contacts to visual artists.

Pointing to Boston's rich cultural history, the New York investment banker and art collector says: "We're trying to create the basis for a new cultural history " by investing in the source of art, the artist. It's also an effort to stir up more conversations about art and to connect "likeminded folks."

Many museums look at the past and present. But Vroom is looking forward, using **Artadia**, the nonprofit organization he founded, to provide direct support to artists.

It's a crucial move, a rejection of the dreamy and misguided stereotype that being cash-strapped and unknown is romantic or good for the artist, the arts, or the culture.

When Vroom got started in 1997, he was responding in part to the gleaming ax that Congress had used not long before to whack the budget for the National Endowment for the Arts by 39 percent. In an interview, Vroom also said that his mother had been an artist, but after divorcing his father she had no resources to go back to that art.

**Artadia** was born as the ArtCouncil in San Francisco. It expanded into Chicago and Houston and has run programs in New York, Miami, Atlanta, and Berlin. Now **Artadia** has come to the Boston area, where local artists have until the end of January to apply for grants of up to \$15,000.

But the money is, in a way, only an attention-getter. Because what **Artadia** really does is pull artists into a national and international network. National and local curators and artists serve as judges to narrow down a list of finalists and choose winners. Inherent in this process are two precious commodities: critical validation and exposure. **Artadia** promotes the work of the finalists, and it folds the winners into its network of artists and curators. So if an artist in St. Louis wants to talk to a gallery owner in Manhattan, **Artadia** can provide a door-opening introduction.

It's the network, more than the money, that could provide a lifetime of opportunity and that will grow with each new round of grants.

**Artadia** is also financially lean. Vroom says total programming costs come to \$100,000 over two years. **Artadia**'s board members fund the organization's operations. Then **Artadia** partners with local organizations to raise money, all of which stays in the community and goes directly to artists. In Boston, those partners are the LEF Foundation, the NLT Foundation, and the Mills Gallery at the Boston Center for the Arts. Using private funds protects the art and the artists from political wrath and the unpredictability of government funding.

The principle is elegant: Appreciate the art and the artist.