



Carolyn Ramo – Artadia


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Artadia's Carolyn Ramo on artist grant...

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In this week's edition of the ArtTactic Podcast, we are joined by **Carolyn Ramo**, executive director of Artadia, a non-profit organization that provides grants to visual artists. First, Carolyn tells us about Artadia, its purpose and who decides who receives grants that the organization allocates to artists. Then, she shares from her perspective how artists are being impacted financially, creatively and in other ways by the current COVID-19 pandemic. Also, Carolyn tells us about Artist Relief, which is providing financial assistance to artists impacted financially by the pandemic, and Artadia's involvement with this effort. Lastly, she instructs how our listeners can contribute to these causes or apply for assistance.

# in other words



Jenna Gribbon's *Couched* (2020) is one of the works included in the Food Bank for New York City: Emergency Benefit Auction 2020 © Jenna Gribbon. Courtesy of the artist and Fredericks & Freiser, New York

## #79 Collaboration is the antidote to the poison

BY **Charlotte Burns**

executive editor of In Other Words



From acts of solidarity to new business models, many in the art world are teaming up during this pandemic to bolster the system and rethink its infrastructure. Joining us for today's show are guests including financial journalist Felix Salmon; gallerists Sadie Coles of Sadie Coles HQ and Vanessa Carlos of Carlos/Ishikawa; artist Doron Langberg; culture and politics writer Marisa Mazria Katz; and nonprofit executives Carolyn Ramo of Artadia and Deana Haggag of United States Artists.

"We are all protecting our small castle or encampment and promoting our own content," says Sadie Coles. "But actually, if you start reaching out to people, it is all about dialogue— and things develop from there."

For more, tune in today.



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# The Path Forward Interview Series | The Artist Advocate: Carolyn Ramo

April 25, 2020

**"ARTISTS CAN BE THE LOUDEST AND MOST INNOVATIVE VOICES, AND I  
LOOK TO THEM TO SPEAK FOR THIS WILD EXPERIENCE."**

**6 QUESTIONS WITH CAROLYN RAMO  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ARTADIA  
NEW YORK CITY**

*Carolyn Ramo is the executive director of the non-profit arts organization [Artadia](#). Since assuming the role in 2012, Ramo has helped the organization provide curator-driven grants and other impactful programs to visual artists in cities across the United States and outside of market centers.*

*Artadia is a national non-profit organization that supports artists with unrestricted awards followed by a lifetime of professional support. Artadia has awarded over \$5 million to more than 335 artists over 20 years.*

*To support artists during the COVID-19 crisis, a coalition of national grantmakers consisting of the Academy of American Poets, Artadia, Creative Capital, Foundation for Contemporary Arts, MAP Fund, National YoungArts Foundation, and United States Artists, have come together to create an emergency initiative to offer financial and informational resources to artists across the United States. [Artist Relief](https://artistrelief.org) will distribute \$5,000 grants to artists facing dire financial emergencies due to COVID-19; serve as an ongoing information resource; and co-launch the COVID-19 Impact Survey for Artists and Creative Workers, designed by Americans for the Arts, to better identify and address the needs of artists. **Applications are open: [artistrelief.org](https://artistrelief.org)***

***1. Talk to me about how the Artist Relief fund came to be, particularly the astounding speed at which multiple organizations responded.***

Artist Relief started with a few phone calls on a Saturday about six weeks ago, and with a shared google doc where we all contributed to a "plan" to think about how we could provide immediate relief to artists. And in a manner that is as equitable as possible.

We just gave our first grants on Friday, April 17, and plan to give at least 100 grants a week until September 1.

It is incredible to work as a true coalition—partners were quickly identified for what we have in common: we are all non-profit organizations, we are all grant-makers giving directly to individual artists, and we are all national in scope.

Once we all gathered, it was important that we were direct about the resources each organization could supply. Committees were formed to play to each organization's strengths, and the time and staff available. We are also very thankful for the graphic and web designers who worked so quickly to get our site up and running.

The most complicated aspects were the application and the fundraising. None of this would have happened if the initial group of foundations who signed on to support didn't believe in this mission, the speed in which we had to launch and this cohort to take on this task.

Ultimately, we all had an immense drive to help artists quickly, as we all know how much artists impact our lives. Also, we want to find ways to continually understand their need. **This has been an entirely ego-less process in every way.**

**2. *Arts Funders Forum research* showed that people in the cultural sector want more “collaboration and partnerships” and “new funding vehicles” in the arts. How might this moment accelerate that shift?**

I have no doubt that working collaboratively and in partnership will be an important — and perhaps the only — option to move forward. So much more can be achieved when you have a brain trust.

While I believe there are indeed enough funds available for all, it is absolutely wonderful to work collaboratively, specifically on fundraising. **When working together, we can be a stronger and bolder advocate for the support of individual artists with the funding community.**

Artists are an essential workforce in their own way and also the gig workers who have little stability. Artist Relief is just one way to provide support for artists at this time and its incredible to see so many local relief efforts. Further, so many organizations are in the similar situation where we are doing our best to move forward and it is exciting to see many collaborative efforts happening in all of the Artadia cities. Working as colleagues in a larger conversation is essential for survival.

***3. We are seeing all programming go virtual. I am very interested in how organizations can convert these “quarantine audiences” into long-term audiences, members, and donors. What’s your view?***

I am amazed about the amount of connectivity taking place—perhaps even more so than normal!—in quarantine, via Zoom and other apps. I typically travel to the Artadia cities to run programs, connect with constituents and more. **With travel completely off the table, and all of us being affected in a very real way, there is a new honest and direct line of communication.**

**Our plan is to focus on the artists, what they are doing and what they are making, and then to reinforce our community obligation to come to their aid.**

For now, we want to make sure first and foremost our grant program is uninterrupted and we can provide artists funding. We will use this opportunity for virtual member events and to give a behind-the-scenes look at our grant-making process and in depth introductions to new Artadia Awardees when possible.

Social media has become even more important. Having a real dialogue versus “just posting.” All this said, I do believe that if a multi-level relationship had not been formed prior to this experience, it may be hard to start one now... its just about maintaining at this point.

**I am also skeptical of the onslaught of virtual programming and feel that we should be leaving it to those organizations and artists who can do it best. In**



**some ways, I am also open to being quiet and taking this time to rethink broader strategies for engagement.**

#### ***4. How is Artadia re-imagining fundraising strategies right now?***

I am taking this incredible time to reevaluate everything Artadia stands for and where we can impact artists, and then also some practical rethinking from doing a deep dive of the budget, to considering how to create meaningful virtual connections. I am simultaneously slowing down expansion plans, while thinking in an entirely new broad way to fulfill our mission: its invigorating and interesting!

With fundraising for Artist Relief, we are focused on relationships with our institutional partners, mostly national and local foundations, who are prioritizing support of relief efforts and the arts. With Artadia, we are focused on securing the funds for our Artadia Award grants for this year and next—its imperative we do not interrupt our support for artists now and in the future.

**We have found that its more possible to have conversations with prospective partners than expected.** With both Artadia and Artist Relief, we all have a track record of impactful work. Additionally, **the input, enthusiasm, and the participation of the board of directors is more important than ever.**

***5. While based in New York City, Artadia is a national grant distributor. How do you think this moment could open up opportunity for increased direct support of local arts ecosystems?***

We made an important change a couple years ago to give our grants annually in each of our Award cities. This was important so we can be consistently present and apart of these communities. Before we can expand to more cities, we felt it was important to demonstrate our deep belief in the local artists in these Award cities, and we created layered networks of supporters with different roles.

Without the possibility of travel, we will be relying on these networks to activate our mission. Artists have many different definitions of success and will have to find ways to reach this at a more local level. Of course, **the art market has drastically shifted, and hopefully will now be a lessened barometer of an artist's success.**

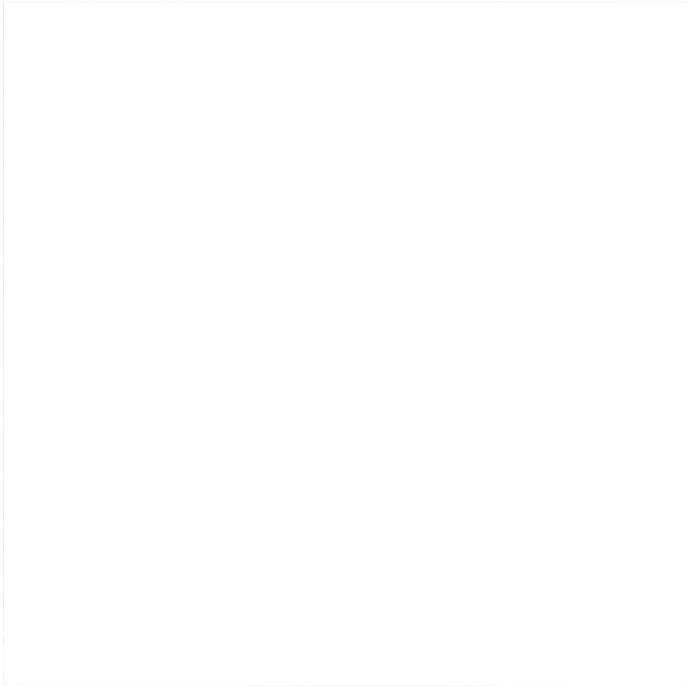
***6. How do you think this crisis might change the landscape of cultural patronage, and society's view of arts?***

It's too hard to say now, but certainly the amount of philanthropy that is designated for artists, and the amount of support individual artists receive in this country, is GROSSLY under what it should be. I sincerely hope there will be a

renewed appreciation for the arts. **Artists can be the loudest and most innovative voices, and I look to them to speak for this wild experience.**

**The inevitable closures of institutions, galleries, and non-profits will be felt by all. Hopefully we examine the huge faults in our economic systems that make it impossible for the most vulnerable populations to excel.**

Artists, like musicians, have NO way to make a living in quarantine, no way to have a steady life. There are so many talented artists who barely have enough to eat. **We must advocate for them.** Now and continue to do so when everything has gone back to "normal."



**Carolyn Ramo** is the executive director of the non-profit arts organization Artadia. Since assuming the role in 2012, Ramo has helped the organization provide curator-driven grants and other impactful programs to visual artists in cities across the United States and outside of market centers.

Before joining Artadia, Ramo was a partner at Taxter & Spengemann, a contemporary art gallery that focused on emerging artist. Prior to that, she worked in senior positions at David Zwirner and Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

# Q+A: CAROLYN RAMO, ARTADIA

[Artadia](#) is one of the many non-profit organizations dedicated to the preservation and development of the arts which have their home base in DUMBO. Founded in 1997, Artadia supports visual artists with unrestricted, merit-based awards; in the last 18 years, they have awarded over \$3 million to artists across the country. We sat down to talk to Carolyn Ramo, Artadia's Executive Director, about the work that her organization does.

## What is the origin story of this non-profit organization?

Artadia is almost 20 years old; we were founded by Chris Vroom, a collector and banker with the basic idea that artists need support. Chris collected artwork and formed relationships with artists, but felt that as a whole, and as a community, there was more that we could do to support artists. The NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] stopped giving individual artist grants about 22 years ago, and he felt that there was more that we could do to help artists in that way.

## How do your grants work? How often are they offered?

We have grants in six different cities: New York, Atlanta, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, and the San Francisco Bay Area. We have one award cycle in each of our cities every year, so about every two months there's a new grant application open. Our grants are unique for a few different reasons: we have an open application, so any visual artist can apply. This allows us to reach a body of

artists that normally wouldn't have access to this sort of support system. We have a two-tiered process where we have curators and established artists reviewing all of the applications, so no matter who applies, their artwork is seen by someone who they normally wouldn't have access to. We have studio visits in the second round, with the group of finalists. To see the work in person is important; with most grants you're just looking at things online and it doesn't provide the best sense of the work. We also give unrestricted funds, so the artists can use it for anything they want. Most of the time it's used for production funds or their rent, but it can also be used for obstacles that are in their way to become the artist that they want to be, such as credit card debt or student loans. Someone even famously used it to get divorced because that was the obstacle that was in their way.

### **Why are they only limited to a few specific cities?**

It's our long term goal to have Artadia in every city that wants it. We were founded in San Francisco— the organization was started in cities that were not commercial art hubs. They were artistic cities, but did not have the same recognition as New York or Los Angeles. As the organization has grown, we've brought it to cities that have an existing robust artist community as well. One of our cities is Houston, which is under-recognized for its artistic community even though it's the third largest city in the country; it most likely has more artists per capita than a lot of other cities!

There's a lot of things that a city has to have to become a city we would want to support. I always say that it has to have artistic institutions, a collector base, and a strong curatorial presence. It has to have a full-bodied community where Artadia would become just one aspect of the support that the artists in that city need. But we are certainly looking to expand; we always talk about possibly expanding to New Orleans, and Miami, and Detroit. There's a wide range of cities that we would like



to be present in. We would love to also consider international cities in order to support their art communities, including Mexico City and others. One of the best things about this job for me is that I get to learn about and visit new cities.

**WE ARE VERY INTERESTED IN SHINING  
A LIGHT ON THE IMPORTANCE OF  
ARTISTS, BUT ALSO RESPONDING TO  
THEIR NEEDS.**

CAROLYN RAMO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ARTADIA

### **What other ways do you support artists?**

We have a lot of different programs that are all geared towards connecting artists to their greater communities. We have programs where curators come to our cities to do studio visits and public programming so everyone can learn and listen from the curators. We just did an event like this last fall at the Brooklyn Museum, which provided another connection between us and the New York community. We are very interested in shining a light on the importance of artists, but also responding to their needs. We have individual outreach and also participate in art festivals.



## Where does the funding for these awards come from?

It's a combination of national and local funding sources. Most of the grants are funded locally, so we're interested in making people join us in recognizing artists in their cities. We're part of organizations in each of our cities, and we work with a large group of individuals that join us as members and then help support the grants. We also utilize a small amount of corporate partnerships as well, but the main idea is to expose the artists and their work to a larger group beyond just us. For example, in the New York branch of our grants, Two Trees has been a huge help to us.

## What is the most rewarding part of your job?

Giving the funds away, for sure. We are just finishing an LA round of applications, and I get to call artists and tell them that they are receiving funds from us. It's not just the money that makes these artists happy, but also the validation and recognition. It's really a fantastic feeling.



ARTADIA X KICKSTARTER PANEL: ART & POLITICS

## Why is funding for the arts important, especially in cities and low-income communities?

I've been saying this a lot lately, but especially in these times, it feels like there are a lot of other worthy causes that deserve our support right now. But I'm also really aware that part of the reason of why are we trying to make sure that our climate change is reversed, or have gun control, is all to preserve our culture and freedom. More than ever, the ability to be able to express ourselves and appreciate other people's expressions is part of having a rich life; in greater sense, this is what I ultimately care about.

## What is your favorite thing about running Artadia?

So many things! On a day-to-day basis, what's exciting is that no day is the same, and it's very challenging to balance all of the different things we have going on. Overall, it's wonderful to be able to make connections on behalf of artists, such as between an artist and a collector or an artist and a curator, and seeing that kind of impact.



ART & DIALOGUE: CHICAGO, HELD AT PARTNER MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART. FEATURING CURATORS NAIMA KEITH, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, EXHIBITIONS AND PROGRAMS AT THE CALIFORNIA AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSEUM AND NAOMI BECKWITH, MCA CURATOR.



## How did you become Executive Director of Artadia?

Most of my prior work experience was in commercial galleries, other than a small stint in the publications and new media department at the Whitney Museum right after I got out of college. I always loved working at galleries because it seemed like the place where you had the most interactions with artists and support to give them. Artadia felt like a natural extension of that thread. I also surprised myself with my ability to fundraise, so it's nice to put that to work to support artists that I care about.

## Why did you base the office in Dumbo?

We were originally part of a cohort of New York non-profits that had exhibition spaces, and as we moved away from that model, we felt that moving our office to Dumbo was a wonderful way to feel a connection between the artists that were here. Combined with being close to Manhattan, where many of our supporters live, this is an essential spot between the two boroughs.

## What is your favorite place in Dumbo?

The lunch options in the neighborhood make me so happy, especially Sweetgreen. But also I love Cecconi's on Mondays where you can get a discounted lunch if you're a member, or Smile to Go, or VHH Foods. Any of those places are really good.

*All images courtesy of Artadia.*



[VIEW GALLERY - 3 IMAGES](#)

NEW YORK  
ART, APRIL 13, 2020

## Artadia's Director Talks the Artist Relief Fund and Collecting as Philanthropy

By Eliza Jordan



It was 1999 in San Francisco when Artadia was founded by **Christopher E. Vroom**. Vroom—an art patron, and founder of such companies like **Art+Culture Projects**, **Artspace**, and **CollectorIQ**—joined a small group of other arts supporters, and focused the organization assisting visual artists with professional and financial support. In 2002, the non-profit company relocated to New York, increasing its geographical scope and expanding its programs to include eight cities: New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Boston, Houston, Chicago, and Atlanta.

Today, Artadia annually awards unrestricted grants to artists, presents an “Art & Dialogue” series of studio visits with its awardees, and continues the Artadia Fellowship to support immigrant and refugee artists with connections to awardees in the Houston art community.

Recently, the organization responded to the COVID-19 crisis by furthering its support for the art community with the Artist Relief Fund, alongside six other organizations that are regular grant-makers—Academy of American Poets, Artadia, Creative Capital, Foundation for Contemporary Arts, MAP Fund, National YoungArts Foundation, and United States Artists. From the start, the initiative raised \$10M, with a generous kick-starting donation of \$5M from **Andrew W. Mellon Foundation**.

*Whitewall* spoke with Artadia’s Executive Director, **Carolyn Ramo**, to hear how about this coalition, and how she’s personally supporting the arts today.

**WHITEWALL: How are you doing amid COVID-19?**

**CAROLYN RAMO:** Feeling very grateful. And overwhelmed by the incredible dire needs of others.

**WW: How are you staying inspired?**

**CR:** By artists, of course. They are remarkably positive and using this time to be creative and thinking with innovation about the future. And by my colleagues in the coalition, who, without ego, have devoted themselves entirely to Artist Relief while simultaneously running their organizations.

**WW: Can you tell us a bit more about Artadia and its missions?**

**CR:** Artadia is about elevating the role of individual artists in our art communities and the dynamic cities where they live and work. We are proud to be giving unrestricted grants to artists throughout the year, and to consider ways to extend that support—specifically through connections to many layers of networks.

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We work in partnership with many curators, collectors, organizations, institutions, individuals, foundations, and corporations who not only help to fund our programs but look to the Artadia Award community to learn more about the important voices of our time.

We just closed out our New York application—opened to artists living and working in all boroughs—so we're looking forward to selecting artists in the upcoming weeks into May through a round of virtual interviews and studio visits. We're keeping proactive no matter what circumstances we're in, but especially now when there is a dire need to help working artists.

**WW: Can you tell us a bit more about the Artist Relief Fund?**

**CR:** Artist Relief has been created by seven national grant making organizations who felt it was important to work together to provide immediate relief to our country's deserving artists during this time of crisis. We will provide 100 \$5,000 grants a week to artists working in many disciplines, for their most pressing needs—particularly for food, housing, and medical expenses.

In addition to funds, we have a list of resources for artists, and we are creating data to share with the entire field. What is clear already is that there is a tremendous need, so we hope to continue to raise more and more relief funding. We invite everyone to contribute if they can via our site.

**WW: On a "normal" day, how does an artist get awarded funds? How about now during COVID-19?**

**CR:** There are many grant opportunities for artists that are discipline specific that are sometimes by nomination, sometimes by open call, sometimes region-specific, and most of the time, awarded based on a specific project or the merit of an artist's work. There are some organizations that offer emergency grants at any time and not just during disasters. During COVID-19, there are more emergency relief efforts which are based on need and also most are region specific. Most are open to all artists to apply.

**WW: Tell us a bit about your ongoing partnerships with museums and galleries and how these relationships help your artists.**

**CR:** We use curators as our jurors for all Artadia Award cycles and also engage both curators and regional institutions to act as partners in our "Art & Dialogue" series. In both programs, these artist/curator introductions are valuable for both parties. Our aim is to have curators learn more about artists they wouldn't have access to previously and to provide them with eventual exhibition opportunities and a critical discourse.

For artists, having a new curator relationship, even just someone new in their studio, is game-changing. We hope artists can learn to make a living from their artwork and practice, so of course, introductions to galleries is also key. We participate in art fairs and have wide international networks that allow for doors to be opened for artists.

**WW: Can you give us a recent specific example?**

**CR:** Atlanta artist Jiha Moon just had a show at **Derek Eller** entirely through an introduction and recommendation via Artadia. And the Whitney Biennial curators use the Artadia Awardee list as a resource.

**WW: Tell us a bit about you personally collecting the work of many of your awardees.**

**CR:** I believe that while it's fun and enriching to live with art, collecting is also a philanthropic act. You are helping a gallery, an artist, an ecosystem. I'm really lucky to have works by a bevy of Artadia Awardees, in addition from some of the artists I worked with in various gallery jobs and hope to continue to grow my collection.

I have also bought a few works from the Artadia auctions. Recently, I got a **Patricia Treib** painting and an **Eamon Ore-Giron** painting. Both are awardees who have been really actively engaged and making really beautiful work.

**WW: Can you tell us a bit about some artists that you're recently supporting or just really into their work?**

**CR:** So hard to pick just a few! I recently saw Summer Wheat's show at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art (my first time to Kansas City!) and was blown away. She is telling such an interesting story through her very joyous and colorful "paintings."

Puerto Rican artist Daniel Lind-Ramos, a recent NADA Artadia Awardee, had a fantastic show at Marlborough gallery that is on "hold." I am lucky to have a painting by **Devin N. Morris** who has a tremendous amount of talent—really a unique voice.