



2017 Brock International  
Prize in Education Nominee

**Adarsh Alphons**

*Nominated by Katelyn Norris*



**2016 Brock International Prize  
in Education Nominee:**

# **Adarsh Alphons**

**Nominated by Katelyn Norris**

# Letter of Introduction

Dear Jurors;

It is an honor on my part to nominate ProjectArt Founder and Columbia University Scholar Adarsh Alphons as a recipient of the 2016 Brock International Prize in Education. As a Board Member and supporter of ProjectArt, I have closely observed the program's exponential growth in impact and engagement over the course of its 5 years in existence, due in no small part to Adarsh's remarkable dedication to and belief in arts education and creativity as both a right and a critical component of childhood development. Having spent several years managing the Corporate Social Responsibility program in my role at Christie's, I have enjoyed the opportunity of working with many major arts and cultural nonprofits and institutions in the US and internationally. I came to know Adarsh and ProjectArt through a Christie's-run event held annually in New York, and immediately recognized the organization as a standout for several reasons; their use of data to illustrate the profound impact of arts education, their open-mindedness, inclusive and community-driven approach, and the vibrant, passionate spirit of Adarsh. It has been a privilege to be involved with the work of ProjectArt over the course of the last several years, and to count Adarsh as a dear, valued friend, professional associate, and frankly one of the most inspiring and service-driven individuals whom I've encountered. What began as a local, grassroots initiative to utilize public libraries as a venue for free art classes for youth in Harlem has transformed into a powerful, infinitely scalable model which has the potential to serve as a momentous national, or international program - allowing youth access to free, professionally taught art classes, employing local artists, and reinvigorating our nation's public libraries. Funding for the arts, in the education space in particular as evidenced by large scale elimination of arts classes in the United States, is often regarded as a luxury rather than a need. Adarsh is committed to reversing this thinking using data that illustrates the undeniable positive effects of creative expression on youth as it pertains to academics, social development, and self discovery. Adarsh's idea is unique in it's utilizing resources already in place as the primary means of its programmatic infrastructure and focusing on communities which have been marginalized by way of socioeconomic factors, thus opening doors and opportunities for children who could be considered systematically limited by standardized education.

This nomination will allow a visionary individual to accelerate what is already rapid momentum in providing youth with access to creativity, and changing the way that the world perceives arts education. To further support my referral for Adarsh's receipt of the Brock Prize, I'll cite recent media coverage surrounding his work, including being named one of the top 50 philanthropists of 2015, a CNN hero, coverage in the Wall Street Journal, PBS, and a blog post written by Adarsh for the Rockefeller Foundation, all of which you'll also find outlined below.

Regards,



Katelyn Norris



# Adarsh Alphons

507 West 144th Street, #2  
New York, NY 10031  
212.256.1947  
adarsh@projectart.org  
projectart.org

## Curriculum Vitae

As an education reformer and **Community Scholar at Columbia University**, Adarsh Alphons is developing new, nation-wide data on the positive impacts of arts education. He founded **ProjectArt** in 2011 because he truly believes that art saves lives. Over the past five years, he has focused on expanding his data-driven, social impact organization to fill the nation's current void in providing youth free access to deep learning in the arts. He is working to reform-at city, state, and federal levels-the ways in which society at large invests in arts education. Expelled from school when he was seven years old for drawing in class, by the time he was fifteen, he was painting portraits for **Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela** and the **Pope**, because one art teacher recognized his passion for art. He extends this passion to his organization ProjectArt, which provides youth a safe space to create, enabling them to develop holistic, pro-socialization skills as they prepare to enter an uncertain, complex, and ambiguous society. The resulting model he has created is infinitely scalable across the United States. ProjectArt is on its way to becoming the nation's largest art school without owning a single building, state's Brian Kelly of the **WSJ**. Alphons' vision spurs rejuvenation at one of our nation's oldest institutions, its libraries.

Prior to his time at Columbia, he received a **Master of Science in Art Administration** from **Boston University**. Since, he has garnered copious awards including, **Hero of Education** from **NYC Councilman Robert Jackson**, and named in **50 Biggest Philanthropists** in the World by **Town and Country**. Most notably, his work was recognized in 2015: Alphons earned a **CNN Hero Award** for his efforts in reforming New York City's art education priorities. When recognized through this award, he revealed, "Nothing about a drawing or a painting is easy."

In a world where everything is about exactly what you can reproduce... we need places where kids can discover who they are without the risk of making mistakes". In addition, he received an **American Express-Ashoka Emerging Innovator**, and represented the US on behalf of the **US Department of State** Bureau of Cultural Affairs.

ProjectArt commences Phase 1 of its national pilot to Detroit and Miami-Dade County in October 2016, and by 2021, the organization is projected to implement classes in twelve additional cities across the United States. Through building communities in the nation's underserved neighborhoods, ProjectArt will instill creative confidence in our youth of promise, reinvigorate the nation's public libraries, engender a spirit of hyper-local service in college students, and support emerging artists through Arts and Social Practice Residencies.

Prior to founding ProjectArt, he was the **Director of Visual Arts at the Harlem School of the Arts** where he restructured their program, doubled enrollment and initiated city-wide projects in partnership with Department of Parks, City of New York. He was the General Manager of **chashama**, the largest studio-residency program in New York City and served as the General Manager and Director of Special Projects at **STREB Lab for Action Mechanics**, home of McArthur Award-winning choreographer Elizabeth Streb.

## Education

**Columbia University**, New York, NY  
*Community Scholar 2014-2017*

**Boston University**, Boston, MA  
*Master of Science in Art Administration 2007*

**Maryland Institute College of Art**, Baltimore, MD  
*Bachelor of Fine Arts 2006*

**Studio Art Center International**, Florence, Italy  
*Semester Study Abroad 2004*

## Experience

**Founder & Executive Director, ProjectArt**  
New York, NY  
July 2011 – present

Founded in 2011, with little more than a bag full of art supplies, ten students and borrowed office space in Harlem. Over the last four years, with the help of hundreds of people who have donated their time, money and resources, Alphon's has created a partnership-based model of change that can confront the national arts education crisis for youth, impact youth on large scale while keeping our costs low. The resulting model is infinitely scalable, while spurring excitement at one of our nation's oldest institutions, its libraries.

**General Manager, STREB Lab for Action Mechanics (S.L.A.M)**

Brooklyn, NY

April 2010 – July 2011

Since 2003, SLAM has become a gathering spot for exchange of creative ideas across cultures of kids, dancers, gymnasts, circus specialists and pedestrians. SLAM is a place to experiment, a place that examines the difference between public and private, a place that is all public, all the time. As the GM, Alphons completely revamped their residency program, upgraded the internal operations in their performance space and lead their education programs, which serve over 400 students on a weekly basis.

**Director, Department of Visual Arts, The Harlem School of the Arts**

New York, NY

August 2008 – March 2010

The Harlem School of the Arts, Inc. is a nonprofit, community-based school of the arts that offers instruction in dance, music, theater and the visual arts to hundreds of students annually. As the Visual Arts Department Head, Alphons increased enrollment, trained visual arts teachers, lead their residency program and introduced their exhibitions programs, which held 11 exhibitions during his time in this role.

**General Manager, chashama, Inc**

New York, NY

January – August 2008

Chashama supports emerging and underrepresented artists by providing one of the most elusive commodities in New York City: space to create. Working with landlords and developers, Alphons identified underutilized real estate spaces that was then donated on a short-term, temporary basis as temporary theaters, galleries, artist studios and rehearsal spaces, where chashama invited artists to use them for free or at highly subsidized rates.

**College Ambassador, Office of the Provost, Maryland Institute College of Art**

Baltimore, MD

January 2006

Alphons architected the concept for student and faculty exchange program between National Institute of Design, India and Maryland Institute College of Art. At the request of President of the college, he was sent to India under the auspices of the Provost to meet with National Institute of Design's faculty, where Alphons sought out faculty and held presentations to secure academic support of program. He successfully negotiated key points of the Memoranda of Understanding and initiated the exchange program, beginning in January 2007.

**Honors**

- + CNN Hero, 2015
- + Top 40 Under 40 USA, Apollo Magazine, 2015
- + Top 50 Philanthropists in the World, Town & Country Magazine, 2015
- + Columbia University Community Scholar, 2014

- + Presenter, US Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, May 2014
- + NYC's 25 Rising Stars, Pave, 2014
- + Moderator, 7th Yale-India Parliamentary Leadership Conference, Indian Embassy, New York, 2013
- + Hero of Education, City of New York, Presented by Councilman Robert Jackson, 2012
- + New Yorker of the Week, New York 1 News, 2011
- + Arts Administration Graduate Assistantship, Boston University, 2007
- + Leadership Recognition Award, Maryland Institute College of Art, 2005-06
- + Competitive Scholarship for Art, Maryland Institute College of Art, 2004-06
- + C.V. Starr Scholarship, Maryland Institute College of Art, 2002-06
- + Academic Excellence Scholarship, Maryland Institute College of Art, 2002-06
- + State Art Recognition Award, Govt. of Kerala, Kerala, India, 2001
- + Best Artist of the Year, Bluebells School, New Delhi, India, 1996, 1997, 1999
- + National Skating Champion, India, 1997

# Letters of Recommendation



**COSTA CONSTANTINIDES**

COUNCILMEMBER  
22<sup>ND</sup> DISTRICT, QUEENS

**DISTRICT OFFICE**  
31-09 NEWTOWN AVENUE, SUITE 209  
ASTORIA, NY 11102  
TEL: (718) 274-4500

**CITY HALL OFFICE**  
250 BROADWAY, SUITE 1808  
NEW YORK, NY 10007

COUNCIL.NYC.GOV/COSTA



THE COUNCIL  
OF  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

CHAIR

SUB-COMMITTEE ON LIBRARIES

COMMITTEES

CIVILSERVICE & LABOR

CONTRACTS

CULTURAL AFFAIRS, LIBRARIES & INTERNATIONAL

INTERGROUP RELATIONS

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

OVERSIGHT & INVESTIGATIONS

SANITATION

TRANSPORTATION

May 1, 2015

Adarsh Alphons  
Founder & Executive Director  
ProjectArt  
601 West 26<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 325  
New York, NY 10001

Dear Mr. Alphons,

As a Council Member in the City of New York, I have made educational access for our children a pillar of my work. I am committed to providing every student in New York with a well-rounded education. Part of that commitment includes supporting innovative and effective after-school arts educational models like that of ProjectArt.

As one of New York's internationally recognized organizations, ProjectArt epitomizes how after-school programs can build on a foundation of collaboration and programmatic excellence to build creative communities on a local level, while supporting existing public institutions like our public libraries. As Chair of the Council's sub-committee on Libraries, I am impressed by your innovative program model that has the potential to be a solution to the national arts education crisis, and I am pleased that the model took root in our City. Your efforts, and those of your faculty and staff, contribute to building a better system to support children in our city from cradle to career. As we strive to reach our goal of providing a world-class education to every student in the City of New York, we look to the exemplary models of programs like yours.

I have seen your work in Astoria first-hand and I applaud you for your dedication to creating high quality learning environments for our City's students. Your collective work directly benefits New York's children and families, and I commend you for our continuing dedication to our most important resource, our youth. Best wishes to everyone at ProjectArt for much continued success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Costa Constantinides".

Costa Constantinides  
Council Member  
District 22



Jo Anne G. Mondowney  
*Executive Director*

January 21, 2016

To whom it may concern:

As the Executive Director of the Detroit Public Library (DPL), I am pleased to support ProjectArt's plans to expand its programming in Detroit. Their unique model as an arts education organization has had a substantial, positive impact on at-risk-youth and immigrant communities. ProjectArt's focus on bringing art to young people in libraries during afterschool hours and during the summer, supports the DPL's mission to spark the creativity and imagination of Detroit's children in safe and welcoming places.

ProjectArt is supported by Ryan Friedrichs, Chief Development Officer (Detroit), and Richard Tao, Senior Education Advisor to the Mayor of Detroit. Ryan and Richard are knowledgeable about the challenges and opportunities for providing engaging programs for the City's children. Together with Adarsh Alphons, Founder and Executive Director of ProjectArt, we will identify public library branches where this free arts program will be most beneficial.

I welcome the opportunity to partner with ProjectArt and I look forward to making high quality art programming available throughout our city. If I can be of any assistance or answer further questions regarding DPL's partnership with ProjectArt, please let me know.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jo Anne G. Mondowney". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Jo Anne G. Mondowney

Executive Director  
Detroit Public Library  
5201 Woodward Avenue  
Detroit, MI 48201  
(313) 481-1302  
jmondowney@detroitpubliclibrary.org



miamidade.gov

Miami-Dade Public Library System  
101 West Flagler Street  
Miami, Florida 33130-1523  
305-375-BOOK  
www.mdpls.org

April 5, 2016

Project Art  
New York City | Detroit | Miami

To Whom it May Concern,

The Miami-Dade Public Library System is pleased to offer this letter of support for ProjectArt. We are committed to supporting Mr. Adarsh Alphon's ProjectArt in their efforts to acquire funding for this worthwhile program.

The Library offers a wide variety of programs and services for the residents of Miami-Dade County. We believe that ProjectArt will be a compliment to these programs. The project stimulates children's minds and enriches the soul while opening doors beyond their community. They can build a foundation of art history with appropriate literacy content. With a mission dedicated to enriching the lives of all children by fostering a love of learning and enabling children to realize their highest potential, we applaud ProjectArt for their efforts to change the way the world values art education and unleashing the power and creativity in every child.

The programs at the Miami-Dade Public Library System will begin modestly, with five public library branches in targeted communities. Based on preliminary research and consultation with the Library and Miami-Dade Department of Cultural Affairs, ProjectArt has selected the Edison Center Branch, Hispanic Branch, Little River Branch, Arcola Lakes Branch, and North Central Branch Library.

We are committed to supporting ProjectArt and look forward to collaborating in this and other educational initiatives.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kimberly Matthews".

Kimberly Matthews  
Assistant Director  
Miami-Dade Public Library System

*Delivering Excellence Every Day*



Cultural Affairs  
111 NW 1st Street • Suite 625  
Miami, FL 33128-1994  
T 305-375-4634 F 305-375-3068  
miamidadearts.org

miamidade.gov

April 7, 2016

Ms. Victoria Rogers  
Vice President/Arts  
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation  
200 S. Biscayne Blvd. Suite 3300  
Miami, FL 33131-2349

Dear Victoria,

I am writing to express my strong support for ProjectArt's application to the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

ProjectArt is a New York-based nonprofit organization that provides free afterschool visual arts classes for children and youth in twenty-two public libraries in New York City. After five successful years, ProjectArt is expanding their program to Miami and Detroit.

Through a partnership with the Miami-Dade Public Library System, ProjectArt: Miami will launch this fall in five Miami-Dade public libraries: Arcola Lakes, Edison Center, Hispanic, Little River and North Central branches. Running through summer 2017, the program plans to provide hundreds of children and youth with free afterschool visual art classes taught by local artists. ProjectArt: Miami includes a community component with a total of 15 student art exhibitions throughout the year that will be open to the general public.

I encourage you to offer any and all support possible to help advance the wonderful work of ProjectArt.

Thank you for your consideration of this application. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly ([MS4@miamidade.gov](mailto:MS4@miamidade.gov); 305-375-5049) should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Michael Spring  
Senior Advisor, Miami-Dade County Office of the Mayor  
Director, Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs

July 15, 2016

From  
Heidi Hovland  
CEO  
DeVries Global  
909 Third Avenue  
New York, NY 10022

To the esteemed members of the Brock International Prize in Education Committee:

I am writing to strongly recommend that you award Adarsh Alphons, founder of ProjectArt, the Brock International Prize in Education. I'm the CEO of DeVries Global, an international communications firm, and a proud board member of ProjectArt. I've had the honor of knowing and working closely with Adarsh over the past three years and have been endlessly impressed by his passion and energy, his vision for eradicating the arts education crisis, and his commitment to the kids and communities he and ProjectArt serve.

The fact that Adarsh has been recognized as a CNN Hero and by Town & Country as a rising star philanthropist speaks to the relatability of what he's set out to achieve through ProjectArt, and the real value he and the organization have already delivered to an underserved and deserving population. Through sheer will and talent, influential relationships built on trust and respect, and a brilliant model that is both efficient and scalable, Adarsh has established a strong base for ProjectArt and set the stage for initial expansion beyond New York.

I believe that recognition by your organization will meaningfully accelerate Adarsh and ProjectArt's momentum, providing the additional credibility and visibility that will enable ProjectArt, and Adarsh himself, to thrive and grow and serve.

Please let me know if you have any questions; I'd be happy to discuss further at your convenience. My mobile is 646-643-1262.

Best regards,



Heidi Hovland

**Evelyn Roman-Lazen**  
**880 West 181 Street, Apt. 6A**  
**New York, NY 10033**  
evelyn.roman.lazen@gmail.com

July 15, 2016

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to recommend that you give Adarsh Alphons your highest consideration for the Brock Foundation International Prize in Education. We are honored to have the opportunity to share with you our enormous gratitude and appreciation for what Adarsh has accomplished with his unwavering commitment towards young artists, such as our daughter Paula Persiani. He was instrumental in helping her develop her artistic voice by providing a creative and engaging space for building confidence, and helped find her artistic voice, which propelled her to excel and gain recognition as an artist at the tender age of 9. Paula now 15, considers Adarsh a mentor, roll model and friend. She was one of his first students when ProjectArt had fewer resources and would meet in a senior citizen center in Harlem. Now an alumna, she was very proud of being part of that young art collective.

Adarsh is very dedicated to his students and the mission of ProjectArt. Through him, our daughter was offered countless opportunities to exhibit her work among large audiences and sell her paintings in art galleries in New York City. At 11 years old Paula had her first art solo exhibit at the Greenwich House produced and curated by Adarsh. She was also a feature on two major news networks and in the magazine Vanity Fair. These opportunities offered her a unique sense of validation that served to boost her self-esteem and confidence in her skills, ideas and quality of her work. This is due to the carefully crafted opportunities and supportive environment that Adarsh provides for his students. His tutelage and guidance has helped us nurture a well-rounded daughter full of ideas to express and share. He also was very instrumental in encouraging Paula to express through art her social justice ideals and concerns. One of her iconic paintings was about the BP oil spill, which was well received. With his guidance she was always able to communicate her voice in a sensible way. The impact ProjectArt has had on our daughter has transcended beyond art into her formal education.

The learning atmosphere provided by Adarsh fosters a collective consciousness that gives students a sense of purpose, ethics, ideas and attitudes with the mindset that they can contribute to the betterment of society through collective and individual effort. The students learned how to critique each other's work in a very mature thoughtful and supportive way, which is seldom encouraged in formal educational settings. Adarsh's work transcends art. We need more social entrepreneurs like him. We have witnessed Adarsh's perseverance and results of his hard work bear fruit. Your Education Prize will allow Adarsh Alphons to propel to greater heights assisting him to continue to impact in such positive ways the young lives of children in our communities across the city.

Sincerely,

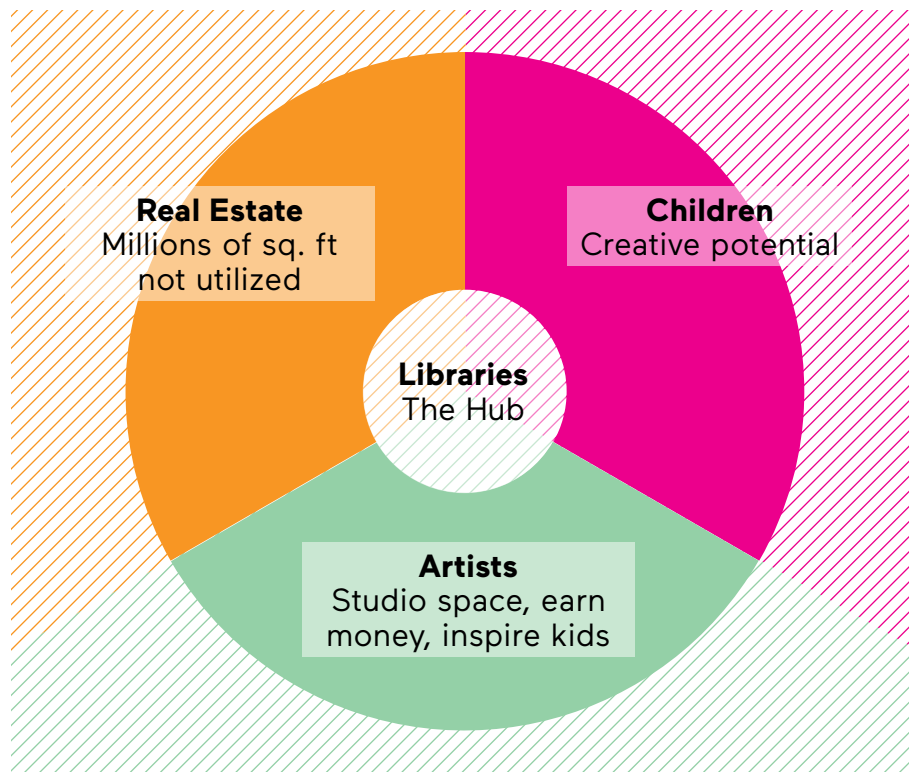


Evelyn Roman-Lazen  
Parent

# **ProjectArt Program Information**

# Building America's Largest Art School\*

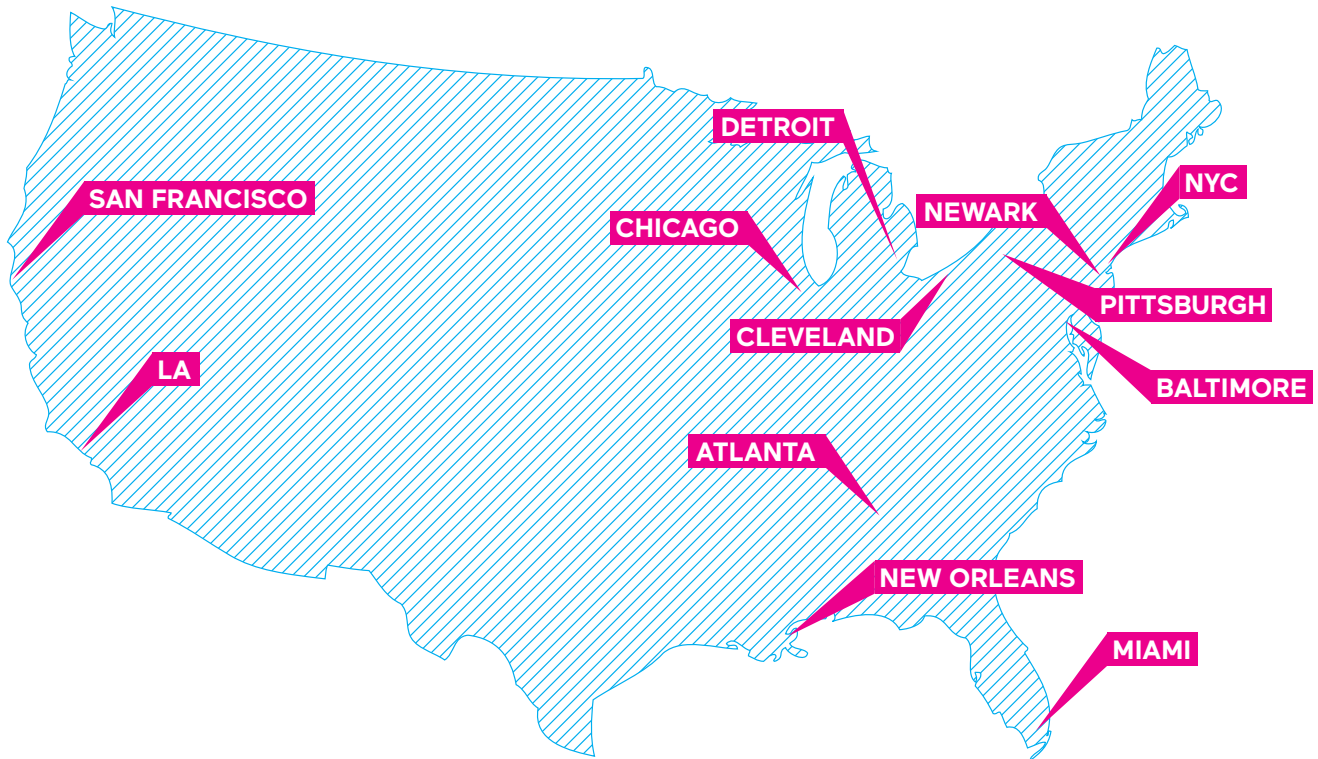
*\*Without owning a single building*





# National Expansion

Projected locations by 2021



## Our Impact

Access to arts-learning is a strong driver of achievement in a child's development.

Children from lower socio-economic backgrounds who receive sustained access to arts learning are:

- + **96 more points** on the SAT on average
- + **3 times** more likely to get elected to class office
- + **3 times** more likely to win an award for school attendance
- + **3 times** more likely to earn a bachelor's degree

### Sources

1. Improved Academic Performance for Students with High Levels of Arts Involvement, Americans for the Arts (2013)
2. The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth, National Endowment for the Arts (2012)

A differentiator of our work is the collateral impact we have on our students and their communities. Based on our latest evaluations:

- + For **57%** of our students, we were the sole reason they engaged with their local libraries
- + **71%** of our students pick-up and read a book at their local library because of ProjectArt
- + **For each hour we bring a child into their local library, it translates into them spending multiple hours there outside of our classes**

**MISSION**

Empower youth, artists, teachers and communities nationally with the positive benefits that arts education delivers.

**THE PROBLEM**

Over 4 million national elementary public school students do not receive arts education because it is underfunded and unavailable. At the same time, access to adequate, affordable and meaningful art studio spaces have also become increasingly out of reach for emerging artists.

**SOLUTION**

ProjectArt transforms public libraries into vital cultural hubs that offer students year-round visual art classes taught by both emerging visual artists and college students.

**RESULTS**

This innovative solution yields five pillars of change: instills creative confidence within our youth, engenders a spirit of service in college students, supports emerging artists by giving them access to studio space, reinvigorates public libraries and builds community in underserved neighborhoods.

**EXPANSION**

Our model has proven results in NYC. We are opening classes in Detroit and Miami in October 2016, as the first step towards becoming the largest arts school in the United States.

**FUNDERS & SUPPORTERS**

The Rockefeller Foundation, eBay, Citibank, Durst Organization, Christie's, Matisse Foundation, Keith Haring Foundation, DeVries Global, Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation, May & Samuel Rudin Foundation and The Catalog for Giving.

**PRESS COVERAGE**

CNN Heroes, Inc Magazine, PBS MetroFocus, Town & Country, New York Observer, Apollo Magazine, The Wall Street Journal and The Atlantic.

**KEY POINTS**

- + Founded in 2011 and is a 501(c)(3)
- + Currently operates after-school classes in 23 public libraries throughout NYC's 5 boroughs
- + Opened with 10 students in 2011 and will serve up to 1,460 youth in 2016
- + Pedagogical Partner: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- + Founder Adarsh Alphons named a CNN Hero in 2015
- + Founder Adarsh Alphons, recipient of the Hero of Education Award from City of New York in 2012

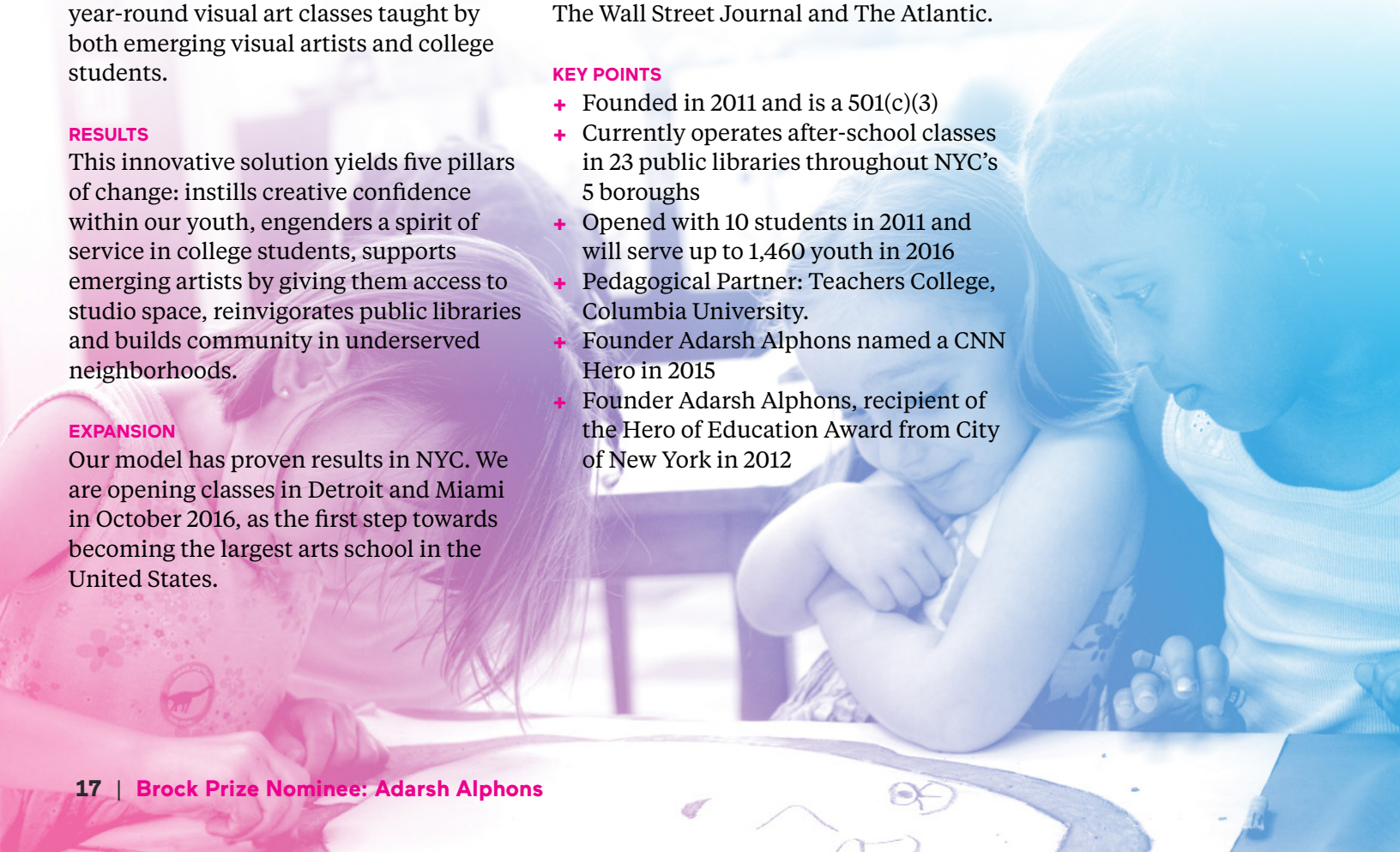
**ProjectArt**

601 West 26th St.  
Suite 325  
NYC 10001

[projectart.org](http://projectart.org)

**Lane Lytle**

212.256.1947  
[lane@projectart.org](mailto:lane@projectart.org)



# The Alphajo Story

Video of ProjectArt's first solo student exhibition of Alphajo's art, held on November 9, 2012 in New York's gallery district.



[Watch video](#)



ProjectArt students



Student Exhibition featuring live collaborative painting by students



Student Exhibition at The Hole Gallery, NYC



ProjectArt Gala, student explaining the meaning behind his colorful painting



Students learning in one of our library locations



Resident Teaching Artist engages youth in a learning-centered environment



Children age 4-7 immersed and engaged

# Published Work





Adarsh Alphons  
Founder, ProjectArt



June 14, 2016

# Unleashing Creativity in Nation's Public Libraries

Topics: [Arts and Culture](#), [Inclusive Economies](#)



*A library outranks any other one thing a community can do to benefit its people. It is a never failing spring in the desert,* said entrepreneur Andrew Carnegie. However, the idea of a free public library can be traced to someone just as entrepreneurial—the principal author of the Declaration of Independence and one whose founding credits include, among other things, the United States of America—Thomas Jefferson.

Over the last three centuries, our libraries have served as an omnipresent and reliable resource of life-long learning for all Americans—from immigrants to veterans alike. **Today, there are 16,536 public library branches in the U.S. and now more than ever, the role and relevance of libraries are in question.** Having visited libraries around the country, I couldn't be more excited about the latent potential in them to address the evolving needs of the communities around them.

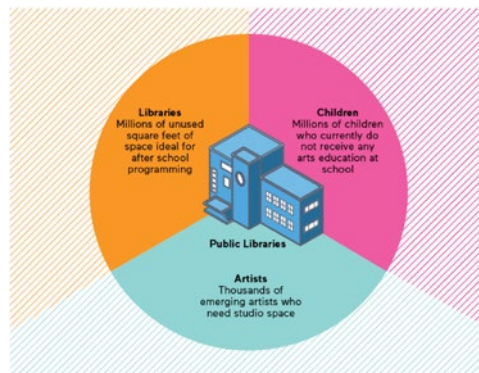
*“Today, there are 16,536 public library branches in the U.S.”*

**There is no institution that is as well positioned to serve the ever-changing needs of our communities as our nations’ public libraries.** It has the infrastructure (functioning buildings) and covers the geographic range (in all 50 states, DC and outlying territories) to address virtually every community’s needs in a grassroots way. There are signs that some libraries have begun re-evaluating their purposes and realizing that purely literacy should not be their *raison d’être*. But they’re far from fully realizing their potential to serve people’s ever-changing needs.

Having founded a nonprofit that is focused on **unleashing the dormant potential within libraries**, I can make a strong case that we have only begun to scratch the surface in the ways libraries can redefine themselves in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A few years ago, I decided to combine three facts I had become acutely aware of:

1. There are millions of children across the United States who are denied art classes in their public schools (it is underfunded)
2. Thousands of artists can’t afford a space to create artwork
3. There are millions of square feet of underutilized real-estate in public libraries across the nation.

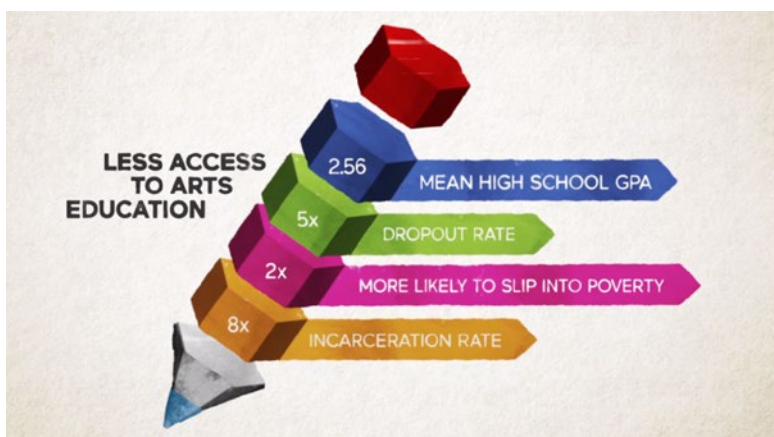
Using a mutually beneficial arrangement, I founded **ProjectArt**, an organization that **grants artists studio spaces in public libraries** (at no cost to the libraries) and in return they teach art classes to youth. It’s one simple solution that solves three complex problems.



The importance of arts education during the developmental years of a child is almost inestimable. If there's one fact to know about the value of arts education, it is that having regular arts classes can reduce drop-out rates in high-school students from low-income communities by up to five-fold.

*“Regular arts classes can reduce drop-out rates in high-school students from low-income communities by up to five-fold.”*

The economics of it isn't bad either. ProjectArt's model (libraries-artists-students) is centered around simple, yet profound Smithian economics—that entities can work together out of self-interest and have unintended positive social benefits. Our programs have proven to attract audiences who wouldn't otherwise come to the library (57% are new audiences) and a majority of them end up benefiting from other resources at the library (71% end up picking up a book). That's prodigious.



ProjectArt is now five years old, operates in 23 libraries in New York City and is scaling up to multiple cities around the country, starting with Miami and Detroit this fall. Using libraries as an anchor, we're solving known crises in an innovative way, while continuing to re-envision libraries as a never failing oasis in communities.

# Making Arts Education Count

Posted by [Adarsh Alphons](#),  
Sep 17, 2014



## The key to building support for arts education lies in the unlikeliest of places: numbers.

There is beauty in numbers. One under-emphasized aspect of arts education that holds tremendous influence in conveying its invaluable and irreplaceable role is numbers. The power of digits to specify impact (however myopic we consider that point of view) is formidable and surely, not to be underestimated. The statistics that substantiate the holistic impact of arts education are staggering. Sometimes, so much so, that even arts professionals are genuinely surprised. As an education reformer who has been advocating for arts education for over a decade, this post discusses two approaches arts organizations are using to create measurable and tangible support for arts education from funders, policy-makers and everyone else.

Aligning your organization's campaigns with current events or trends are a powerful way to tap into existing popular phenomenon and gain traction for the arts. Your friends in PR would tell you that a sure shot way to attract publicity for an event or issue is to connect it to contemporary phenomenon. One such example is what ProjectArt, the organization I founded, did for Thanksgiving (and the shopping frenzy that follows, Black Friday) last year. We used infographics to point out some interesting consumer trends and connected that to giving. For instance, on Black Friday the average American spent \$423 last year, up from \$398 the year before. Using an email newsletter, we juxtaposed that fact with another relevant fact from the National Retail Federation, that 79% of Americans would rather have a charitable donation made in their honor than receive a give they wouldn't use. Furthermore, we also used data that we collected from evaluating our students, such as 81.2-85% of students and parents believe their child's self-confidence has improved by taking classes with us. Then, we connected it all together and made the ask by showing how much impact just \$20 could make (give one hour of free arts education to a child) during the holiday season. We concluded the campaign with a [Thunderclap campaign](#) on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, the International Day of Giving, reaching 105,524 people that day, and using the irrefutable value of data to attract supporters. The exactness of numbers makes these facts hard to deny.

Since 1996, Center for Arts Education (CAE) in New York has published research to advocate to policy makers about the strategic importance of arts education for youth. In 2007, CAE published [My Child, the Arts and Learning: A Guide for Parents, PreK-2nd Grade](#). Rather than considering the work done by publishing the report, they printed it in nine different languages and distributed it widely throughout public schools in New York City, hitting it from a ground-up approach and ultimately, aimed at policy makers. The guide provides parents and teachers with resources including, New York City and New York State arts requirements, which states every public school child is legally entitled to receive arts education in school. Sustained efforts of that nature coupled with a new municipal administration in New York City that is more politically receptive to the cause, has resulted in a massive recalibration of priorities for the better. Mayor de Blasio has proven intent on putting the advocacy aimed at his government to work and has included \$23 million in his Executive Budget for expanded arts education in city schools. In following up, CAE also created a [Thank the Mayor](#) campaign that lets supporters send an email to City Hall for this much-needed allocation.

Using numbers (especially research) to advocate for the cause (bonus points if you use a bit of creativity in messaging) can make the difference between whether or not an issue gets heard or not, and ultimately, to making arts education essential to public education. The burden is on us, arts education organizations to prove the relevance of the discipline and hence, the need for the public, policy makers, donors and everybody else to support it. The argument of having arts education for arts education sake is not only insufficient, it doesn't do justice to the cause. At a time when education reform is being widely debated, we need to use the arsenal of research that is out there to inform, inspire and mobilize the support that we desperately need and is within our grasp.

**Press**

# Art pioneer once expelled for doodling

05.28.15



[Watch video](#)

**New York (CNN)** - Growing up in India, Adarsh Alphons was expelled from school for doodling. He continued drawing in class at his new school, but there he got a different reaction.

“The principal said, ‘You know what? Just keep drawing in every class. Draw on the walls of each class. After you’ve finished the walls, go to the next class, draw on those walls. Paint the whole school.’” Shortly after, Alphons had the opportunity to present a drawing to Nelson Mandela and later was commissioned by the Vatican to do a painting for Pope John Paul II. Now an artist in New York City, Alphons was disheartened to learn that nearly three in 10 public schools lack even one full-time arts teacher. And across the country, when it comes to school budget cuts, arts programs are often among the first to go.

“Every child needs to have space for them to create,” said Alphons, who set out in 2011 to bridge the gap. “I decided we need to be the ones to put paintbrushes in the hands of kids.” His nonprofit, ProjectArt, provides

free arts classes for New York City public school children. The group holds its classes in libraries, and at the end of each semester, the children exhibit their art in galleries.

Since 2011, ProjectArt has expanded from one branch in Harlem to a network of 11 libraries throughout the city. The group has reached roughly 1,000 children. I sat down to talk with Alphons about his motivation and his work. Below is an edited version of our conversation:

**CNN:** Why do you feel art is important for children?

**Alphons:** I believe art is essential to a well-rounded education because it lets a child learn things that they wouldn’t learn through other fields. It’s meditative, it’s reflective, but it also involves skill and hard work.

Nothing about a drawing or a painting is easy. In a world where everything is about exactly what you can reproduce, what you’ve learned and you study for the

test, we need places where kids can discover who they are without the risk of making mistakes. They need a place that accepts them for who they are, that brings out a self-expression and beauty.

The lack of arts education is really an issue all over the United States, from Los Angeles to the South Side of Chicago to New Orleans. So we want to expand nationally. We're going to add more branches in this city, and we want to add branches across the States.

**CNN:** How do you decide where to implement your program?

**Alphons:** We're looking at the public schools that don't have any art teachers. We know where those schools are, and based on that, we open our classes in public libraries that are adjacent or near those schools.

Getting children into these libraries is brilliant, because libraries are really an institution that's there to support them. And we want them to use the library facilities and to discover that there are community hubs where culture can thrive, where they can be safe, where they can learn and partake in its offerings in their own community. And with 207 branch libraries in New York City, one virtually in every neighborhood, it is possible to do that.

**CNN:** You hold exhibitions at the end of each semester. Why is it important for the students to display their work?

**Alphons:** It acknowledges the hard work the child put into it. It celebrates them, and it lets them know what's possible if they chase after their dreams.

We hold our exhibitions in contemporary art galleries in New York's art district. A lot of these families have never stepped foot in a Chelsea gallery, and now their children's artwork is adorning its walls. It's quite an amazing moment because the children are so proud of it.

They come dressed to the nines, and they point and talk to everyone. They show and tell their artwork to everyone who comes to the show, and it's just an easy way to build pride in children.

**CNN:** You went from getting in trouble to meeting Mandela. What was that like?

**Alphons:** I felt like I got some validation. Someone believed in me. I took that belief, and I went back to my classroom. I was drawing well, but my grades also jumped.

And then I started to draw more, and I was making a drawing of Mandela. I went and showed it to my principal, and she said, "Actually, next month Mandela is visiting Delhi, and we have a delegation from our school going. You should come with us." Three years ago, I was being kicked out of a school, and now I was presenting a portrait of Mandela to Nelson Mandela, which is insane. But I was only able to do that all because my principal believed in me. And that's what I'm trying to do with ProjectArt. We believe in them, no matter what they do. Our goal is not to create artists. Our goal is to let kids discover themselves.

*<http://www.cnn.com/videos/tv/2015/05/28/cnnheroes-adarsh-alphons.cnn>*

# Importance of Art Education

04.25.16



[Watch video](#)

When school budget cuts come up, arts and music programs can be some of the first on the chopping block. Yet research has shown the positive impact of arts education on children’s overall success in school. A non-profit called ProjectArt provides art classes in public libraries around New York City, in neighborhoods where local schools have had to cut art classes.

<http://www.thirteen.org/metrofocus/2016/04/the-importance-of-art-education/>



WSJ

# Opinion Journal: Art Class is Back in Session

05.11.16



[Watch video](#)

Arts in Review Assistant Editor Brian Kelly on ProjectArt, a nonprofit that's pioneering arts education for kids.

<http://www.wsj.com/video/opinion-journal-art-class-is-back-in-session/9A328196-CAD7-4115-92DF-5C656A134091.html>

# T&C 50: The Biggest Philanthropists of 2015

04.07.15

## Adarsh Alphons

**Grand Plan:** Help troubled New York City students via ProjectArt, which provides free art classes at public libraries in all five boroughs.

**Making Headlines:** Alphons who was a troubled student himself (he was once expelled for drawing at the expense of his studies) until one art teacher began encouraging his talent, founded ProjectArt in 2011 and by 2014 had 11 thriving neighborhood programs, funded heavily by art enthusiasts from David Maupin to Kyle DeWoody.

*<http://www.townandcountrymag.com/leisure/g1206/tc-biggest-philanthropists-of-2015/?slide=30>*



# 40 Under 40 USA: Adarsh Alphons

09.01.15

The fact that it's pretty difficult to find time to speak to Adarsh Alphons – I caught him early one morning, before a full day of meetings, a little bleary-eyed – is testament to the huge success of his organisation, ProjectArt. Although only four years old, ProjectArt is gathering a head of steam. What began as a children's art workshop in Harlem, New York, in 2011, spread across the city over the following years, and looks set to expand to other US cities: first Miami, then Detroit, with others to follow. Perhaps even further afield.

His organisation's success speaks to a need in art education in the US – what ProjectArt calls a 'crisis'. With arts subjects increasingly devalued in school curricula, due to a perfect storm of standardised testing, corporate interests and the use of exam results to assess teaching performance, a profound deficit has emerged in arts education. Arts subjects, sidelined in favour of ostensibly more 'useful' STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), have been relegated to such an extent that many US schools no longer employ art teachers at primary or secondary level. In New York alone, 28 per cent of city schools lack a full-time art teacher; 20 per cent have no art teaching at all.

The statistics prove the STEM assumption wrong, however. The US's consistently weak performance on the OECD list of educational standards across the developed world is inversely proportional to the amount of per capita investment in innovative new businesses it receives. It almost goes without saying that such new ideas tend to be fermented in the freer atmosphere of arts subjects. Test scores down, innovation up. Right now, something isn't working.

ProjectArt was established to tackle this crisis. In 2011, having recognised the dearth of art education in New York, Indian-born Alphons rented office space in Harlem and set up an art workshop for children in the local area. For Alphons, the organisation is an

extension of a childhood passion: as a seven-year-old, he was expelled from school for drawing in every class, but had success as a teenage artist, making portraits for Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa and the Pope. Alphons recognised himself in the children and young people for whom art was a creative outlet and a mode of self-identification.

From its Harlem beginnings, ProjectArt rippled outwards across the five boroughs of the city. Making use of public infrastructure – usually libraries, but also parks and university buildings – ProjectArt workshops offer free art classes, on weekends, evenings and holidays, in areas of economic deprivation across the city. The workshops are set up within walking distance of schools with identified needs, and the groups are small, of no more than 15 participants, and led by skilful and engaging artists and arts educators. ProjectArt's 10-week programmes culminate in an exhibition at a gallery space in Chelsea, New York (and, this year, at Pulse Art Fair); at the openings, the young artists proudly show off their work to family members.

The result of Alphons' innovative approach to art education is by definition impossible to fully gauge; but one assessment might be made in reference to statistics published on the company's site, which highlight the disparity in later-life success between those with access to arts education and those without. It's staggering. ProjectArt is an innovative step towards closing that gap.

*Ben Street*

<http://www.apollo-magazine.com/adarsh-alphons/>

# ProjectArt Brings Arts Education to NYC Kids Who Need It Most

03.06.15

Art fairs are primarily thought of as the trade floor of the art market, a place to buy and sell art, even discover the next art market darling. Rarely are they thought of as a platform for helping New York City school kids receive an adequate arts education. But at Pulse New York's Points section, a specially curated selection of booths for non-profits and alternative arts organizations, the fair is highlighting exciting projects that are just as vital to the life cycle of the art world—and their booths just as engaging.

On the black walls of ProjectArt's booth (C10) is a bright white infographic that charts the staggering differences between kids with access to arts education and kids without. Blurbs attaching to an arrow sharply dipping towards the ground read "5X More Likely to Drop Out of Highschool," and "2.56 Median High School GPA." Meanwhile, blurbs branching from an arrow careening up toward the ceiling read "96 More Points on the SAT on average," and "3X More Likely to Be Elected to Class Office."

"The data is all there," said Adarsh Alphons, founder and executive director of ProjectArt to the Observer. Mr. Alphons started the organization in 2011 using only his savings. The goal was to provide New York City kids with an arts education they weren't getting from a burdened and under funded school system. In a report released by Comptroller Scott Stringer, 28 percent of New York City schools lack arts teacher who are employed full-time, and 20 percent don't have any arts teachers at all. Mayor Bill de Blasio has pledged \$23 million to hire new teachers and support arts education, but as Mr. Alphons pointed out, that may not be enough.

And so Mr. Alphons recruited friends and started getting funding. He has been able to create a series of art classes run through the Public Library System. The classes are held in libraries that are in close proximity to schools with some the least access to

arts programming in the city. He uses research data to stay up to speed on the school system's progress, and how its students are fairing. He's been able to hire and pay teachers—many are artists themselves—to run classes, and currently has a dozen library locations up and running.

As I was speaking with Mr. Alphons, who happened to drop by ProjectArt's booth? Donald Rubin, who co-founded the Rubin Museum of Art with his wife Shelley and happens to be one of ProjectArt's earliest and most important funders. "I think it's great what they're doing," he told us. Mr. Rubin recounted the early inspiration he found in watching local kids paint murals on the sides of buildings in the South Bronx, imagery that enlivened the neighborhood he described as filled with empty lots and brownstones.

ProjectArt's booth also drew large crowds at the Young Collectors cocktails party at Pulse on Thursday night. The group is using a photo booth and social media to spread awareness about their project, and the success they've had so far. Visitors can pose for a photo, props are provided if you want them, and the final image framed with the message "Art is a Right."

So how many people have seen their message so far? Mr. Alphons said about 500 photos were taken last night alone. And the real success stories are the proof that the group is on to something. He said two of their alumni now attend LaGuardia High School for Music and Art and the Performing Arts in Manhattan, one of the premier public arts high schools in the country.

"We're just looking at one community right now," he said. "But this could be a national solution."

*Alanna Martinez*

<http://observer.com/2015/03/projectart-supports-arts-education-refore-in-new-york-schools-through-its-pulse-booth/>

# The Country's Cultural Capital Has a Big Arts-Education Problem

05.28.14

With its art fairs, first-class museums, a multi-billion-dollar theater industry, and the world's largest performing arts center, New York City's commitment to the arts seems absolute. But when it comes to providing access to arts education in public schools, the city's comptroller has given New York a failing grade.

In April, the office released its first-ever State of the Arts report, finding a big difference between the level of arts education in wealthier and lower-income schools. This has raised fresh questions about how art enhances learning and whether children will be better prepared for a 21st century economy if they have mastered the "soft" skills that art teaches. In an increasingly "creative" economy, the argument goes, students need original thinking to thrive—and then only wealthy New Yorkers are being set up to succeed.

The comptroller's office analyzed three aspects of arts programming: whether schools have a full- or part-time certified arts teacher; a formal partnership with an arts or culture organization; and a dedicated room for visual arts, music, theater, or dance. When researchers looked for geographic patterns in the data, they found that access to arts education reflects income-inequality trends in the city.

Arguably, students in lower-income schools need exposure to creative subjects the most, but as you can see from the map below, the city's arts programs are sharply divided by neighborhood. Each of the dots represents a school that doesn't have an art teacher.

While state law mandates that every middle and high school student has a certified arts teacher, the report found that more than 400 middle and high schools in the city don't meet that criteria. Forty-two percent of these schools are in the south Bronx and central Brooklyn, both lower-income areas of the city. And nearly half of the schools that don't have a certified

arts teacher or an arts partnership are in poorer districts. "It shouldn't make a difference what neighborhood you live in," says comptroller Scott Stringer. "Every student in New York City should have the opportunity to receive a strong education in the arts."

Eric Pryor, executive director of The Center for Arts Education, an arts-education nonprofit that works in New York public schools, describes a "perfect storm" that created this situation. For one thing, local politics have worked against arts education. During Rudy Giuliani's mayoral administration, there were few programs around the city. Eventually, the mayor established the Project Arts program, allocating money for arts partnerships and education in public schools. But Michael Bloomberg took a different approach, using a "principal as CEO model" that gave administrators the autonomy to use resources as they saw fit. Project Arts money was still part of schools' budgets, but principals could choose to divert the money to other areas. In poorer neighborhoods, that often meant cutting the arts.

Around the same time, the federal government unveiled No Child Left Behind, standards-based educational reform that ushered in a culture of "high stakes testing." As a result, teachers spent more time on subjects like English and math, and less on the arts. As New York started feeling the effects of the recession, it had to tighten its budget. "Because we test literacy and we test math levels, subjects like foreign language and PE and yes, arts, are among the first to be cut," Pryor said.

Ironically, the Bloomberg administration has commissioned large-scale art pieces by famous contemporary artists, such as Christo and Jeanne-Claude's Gates and Olafur Eliasson's Waterfalls. This may have boosted tourism and was certainly appreciated by some New Yorkers. But meanwhile, the most vulnerable students in the city saw their arts education

systematically cut, says Adarsh Alphons, founder of ProjectArt, an organization that works with libraries on arts programming.

“It’s particularly heartbreaking because it’s youth from lower-income neighborhoods that the arts have the highest impact on,” Alphons says, citing a 2012 National Endowment of the Arts report on the arts and at-risk youth. “Teenagers from low socioeconomic status who don’t have access to arts education have a five times higher chance of dropping out of school. Studies show that students in the arts outperformed their non-arts peers on the SAT by 96 points, while a child who has continued access to arts education has a 74 percent higher chance of planning to attend college.”

Of course, not all kids will be into art, but Pryor argues that a diverse, well-rounded curriculum inevitably engages more students and strengthens attendance. “Some students excel in technology and science,” says Pryor. “But you can guarantee there are a large number of students who are excited about dance and music too. We’ve seen that confidence breeds confidence, so that engagement in the arts, just like a sports team, does help a student’s confidence when they have to face a math test the next week.”

There may be small signs of progress. This month, Mayor Bill de Blasio’s administration revealed its latest financial plan, which includes a \$20 million allocation for expanded arts education. By the comptroller’s estimates, it would take \$10 million to place a certified arts teacher in every middle and high school that currently lacks one.

Some people who have spent decades in arts education are cautiously optimistic, while others are a little skeptical. “This is only a proposed budget,” says Alphons. “It’s certainly a good first step in fighting this problem, but we will see on July 1st how much money truly remains for increased arts education and how much schools really get come September.” Ultimately, this is a national problem, he says. “Nearly four million school students in the US currently get no arts instruction during their formative years.” While a similar report probably could have been written for many cities across the country, it’s a particularly poignant problem in New York, a city that prides itself on cultural capital and upward mobility.

*Jacoba Urist*

<http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/05/the-countrys-cultural-capital-has-a-big-arts-education-problem/371658/>

# 'ProjectArt' program turns New York Public Libraries into studios for young students uptown

07.19.13

One enterprising artist is painting over two public funding crises in one stroke.

Adarsh Alphons wants to remedy the gap in art classes and public education, while simultaneously helping to restore youth programming to libraries, where budget cuts have eliminated thousands of hours of programming. Alphons' organization, ProjectArt, is turning the library into a studio where low-income uptowners ages 5 to 18 learn to prime a canvas, mix a color palette and sculpt a masterpiece.

ProjectArt temporarily moved to the Hamilton Grange Library last fall when its former studios became a liability with leaking bathrooms and faulty sinks. "We urgently needed space, and libraries are unable to provide as much programming as they used to," Alphons said. A library spokeswoman called the partnership a "win-win situation" that works to the benefit of Harlem residents.

"The New York Public Library has experienced budget cuts over the past five years, which has made it difficult for the staff to offer the same types of programs they have offered in the past," said Amy Geduldig, the organization's public relations manager. "Programs like ProjectArt help provide us with programs and resources that are important to the people we serve."

Alphons, 30, plans to expand the program to other branches in Harlem, including Countee Cullen. His ambitious proposal was born of an urgency to keep youth arts programs alive even when public money dried up. "Arts education used to be part of a holistic public school curriculum, but that's just not true anymore," said Alphons, a former arts administrator at the Harlem School for the Arts who writes grants to pay for his program.

Children of ProjectArt, Harlem, New York, a summer arts camp for children aged 4-12, create Nelson Mandela-inspired art and messages for peace, then offer their works to passersby on the streets of Harlem and exhibit them in a Chelsea gallery. "Art isn't just a side activity or supplemental, but — as research shows — it's a fundamental part of development."

It certainly benefited Alphons, who grew up in India and started drawing when he was 7, after his family moved to the southern part of the country where he lacked a common language to communicate with his classmates. "Art really saved my life," said Alphons, who went from serial doodling to earning a commission from Pope John Paul II to create a mural and drawing a portrait for former South African leader Nelson Mandela.

At the conclusion of ProjectArt classes, the student work is exhibited at a gallery in Chelsea. One student, Yrma Batista, called the experience "awesome."

"To have that opportunity at my age is something I'm really grateful for," added the 16-year-old East Harlem resident, who had never taken an art class before ProjectArt.

In the fall, Alphons hopes to begin offering his programs at three Harlem library locations, and he'd like to set up the easels in Washington Heights and Inwood by spring. "It's a partnership that just makes sense," said Alphons.

*Laignee Barron*

<http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/manhattan/artist-bold-stroke-inspiration-article-1.1404105>