

Hadi Eldebeck « Why must artists be poor ? »

[https://www.ted.com/talks/hadi_eldebek_how_artists_contribute_to_the_economy_and_how_we_c
an_support_them](https://www.ted.com/talks/hadi_eldebek_how_artists_contribute_to_the_economy_and_how_we_can_support_them)

1 I come from a family of five brothers, all scientists and engineers. **A few years** ⁽¹⁾ ago, I sent
2 them the following email: "Dear brothers, I hope this message finds you well. I am emailing
3 to let you know that I'm dropping out of my master's program in engineering to pursue a
4 career as a full-time musician. All that I ask from you is not to worry about me."

5 Brother number one replied. He was encouraging but a bit skeptical. He said, "I wish you **the**
6 **best of luck** ⁽²⁾. You're going to need it."

7 (Laughter)

8 Brother number two was a little bit more skeptical. He said, "Don't do it! This will be **the**
9 **worst mistake of your life** ⁽³⁾. Find a real career."

10 (Laughter)

11 Well, the rest of my brothers were so enthusiastic about my decision, they didn't even
12 respond.

13 (Laughter)

14 I know that the skepticism coming from my brothers is out of **care and concern for me** ⁽⁴⁾.
15 They were worried. They thought it would be difficult to make it as an artist, that it will be a
16 challenge. And you know what? They were right. It is such a challenge to be a full-time artist.
17 I have so many friends who need to have a second job as a plan B in order to pay for their
18 bills, except **that plan B** ⁽⁵⁾ sometimes becomes their plan A. And it's not just my friends and I
19 who experience this. The US Census Bureau states that only 10 percent of art school
20 graduates end up working as full-time artists. The other 90 percent, they change careers, they
21 work in marketing, sales, education and other fields.

22 But this is not news, right? We almost expect **the artist** ⁽⁶⁾ to be a struggling artist. But why
23 should we expect that?

24 I read an article in the "Huffington Post" saying that four years ago, the European Union
25 began **the world's largest ever arts funding initiative** ⁽⁷⁾. Creative Europe will give 2.4
26 billion dollars to over 300,000 artists. In contrast, the US budget for our National Endowment
27 for the Arts, the largest single funder for the arts across the United States, is merely 146
28 million dollars. To put things into perspective, the US budget for the military marching bands
29 alone is almost twice as much as the entire NEA.

30 Another striking image comes from Brendan McMahon for the "Huffington Post," saying that
31 out of the one trillion dollar budget for military and defense-related spending, if only 0.05
32 percent were allocated to the arts, we would be able to pay for 20 full-time symphony
33 orchestras at 20 million dollars apiece, and give over 80,000 artists an annual salary of 50,000
34 dollars each. If that's only 0.05 percent, imagine what **a full one percent** ⁽⁸⁾ could do.

35 Now, I know we live in a capitalist society, and profits matter a lot. So let's look at it from a
36 financial angle, shall we? The US nonprofit arts industry generates more than 166 billion
37 dollars in economic activity, it employs 5.7 million people and it returns 12.6 billion dollars in
38 tax revenue.

39 But this is only a financial angle, right? We all know that the arts is way more than just an
40 economic value. The arts brings meaning to life. It's the spirit of our culture. It brings people
41 together and it supports creativity and social cohesion.

42 But if the arts contributes this much to our economy, why then do we still invest so little in
43 arts and artists? Why do more than 80 percent of our schools nationwide still experience
44 budget cuts in arts education programs? What is it about the value of arts and artists that we
45 still don't understand?

46 I believe the system is flawed and far from being fair, and I want to help change that. I want to
47 live in a society where artists are more valued and have more cultural and financial support so
48 they can focus on creating arts instead of being forced to drive Ubers or take corporate jobs
49 they'd rather not have. There are other sources of income for artists, however. There are
50 private foundations, grants and patrons who give money, except **a vast majority of artists** ⁽⁹⁾
51 don't know about these opportunities. On one side you have institutions and people with
52 money. On the other side you have artists seeking funding, but the artists don't know about
53 **the people with the money** ⁽¹⁰⁾, and the people with the money don't necessarily know about
54 the artists out there.

55 This is why I am very excited to share "Grantpa," an online platform that uses technology to
56 match artists with grants and funding opportunities in a way that is easy, fast and less
57 intimidating. Grantpa is only one step towards solving an existing problem of funding
58 inequality, but we need to work collectively on multiple fronts to reevaluate how we view the
59 artists in our society. Do we think of arts as a luxury or a necessity? Do we understand what
60 goes on in the day-to-day life of an artist, or do we still believe that artists, no matter how
61 struggling they are, are happy simply because they're following their passion?

62 In a few years, I plan to send my brothers the following email: "Dear brothers, I hope this
63 message finds you well. I am emailing to let you know that I am doing great and so are
64 hundreds of thousands of artists who are being valued more culturally and financially and
65 getting enough funding to focus on their crafts and create more art. I appreciate all of your
66 support. Couldn't have done it without you."

67 Thank you.