

# PICASSO BABY.

A close-up photograph of a Black man and a woman of South Asian descent in profile, facing each other and smiling. The man is wearing a white dress shirt and a thick gold chain. The woman is wearing a dark blue top. They are surrounded by a blurred crowd of people in the background. A white text box with a black border is overlaid on the lower part of the image.

**A Job Application from Alex Jonathan Brown.**

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# THE ARTISTS ARE PRESENT.

In August 2013, Jay Z took over the Pace Gallery in New York City, performing his song “Picasso Baby” for six hours in front of an audience of fans, art critics and fellow artists from all genres. The footage of that performance was cut into “Picasso Baby: A Performance Art Film” The film has been viewed by more than 3 million people in six weeks, more people than will visit the Museum of Modern Art in 2013.

“Picasso Baby” represents where art is right now: a literal head-to-head meeting between big personalities in traditional art forms and rock stars transcending pop culture. While it might seem that this sort of “when-worlds-collide” event is best suited for the art scenes on the coasts, the right plan could transform Fort Wayne into an incubator for these sorts of collaborations.

Events like Fortissimo, Star Crossed and Fort Wayne Ballet, Too have shown that AU already has the potential to make those connections happen as special events. However, by encouraging established organizations to innovate, actively seeking new artists to support, giving those groups the resources needed to combine their efforts, and ensuring that this all happens with a sustainable economic model, Arts United can fulfill its vision of turning Fort Wayne into a top-ten arts community, nationwide.



**STEP ONE:**

**PUBLISH  
OR  
PERISH.**

When I was working on my Master's in Communication Studies at Ball State, I spent all of my time hanging out with grad students. Grad students are a high-stress bunch. Almost everyone has their eye on a PhD school, a job after that, and a tenure-track position after that. Everyone's writing and researching and trying to get published, trying to get their name on as many things as they can because that's what makes the difference. You get into the good schools, you get the good job, you get tenure because you get publications.

You want tenure because it means you can take your foot off the gas. Of course, you still publish, but the perish part of that equation is off the table.

## **Arts United needs to let everyone know there's no such thing as tenure.**

There's no history long enough, no endowment big enough to rest on your laurels. The shows you put up last year, the press you got, the surplus you posted, they're yesterday's news. Young artists and small organizations live that every day, because the next event is the one that will make or break you. Every time.

Putting out a high-quality artistic product that engages and inspires the community isn't what gets done after the grants are secured, it's what earns organizations a spot at the table. By using merit grants to encourage organizations to take calculated risks, to create work that reaches new audiences, and to do so using sustainable economic models, Arts United can help their principal partners kickstart an artistic revolution utilizing the systems that are already in place.



STEP TWO:

**THE  
NEXT BIG  
THINGS.**

In the next ten years, an artist will come out of Fort Wayne who makes an impression on a national level. As it currently stands, chances are good she will have achieved that success on her own, or with the help of someone who saw her talent and had the resources to boost that signal.

## **Arts United needs to become the organization that promotes local artists to a national level.**

Supporting individuals and small groups of artists looks different than supporting large arts organizations. The person writing a screenplay in her free time doesn't need matching contributions to her 401(k), she needs \$250 to cover festival submission costs. The band that is building a following of their own at The Brass Rail every weekend doesn't need health insurance, they need \$1500 to record their first album.

Arts United can do more than just offer small grants for specific projects, though. There's no one better suited in the community to become the one-stop shop for The Next Big Thing.

It's opening night of a photography show in a coffee shop somewhere in town. The photographer's incredibly proud of the work, pretty sure it's the best she's ever done, and she's not sure what happens next. She doesn't know it, but there's someone from Arts United there.

And on Monday, she gets a phone call. From Arts United. They want to give her all-access to shoot Opening Night at ArtsLab, or they want to help promote her next project, or they just want to know how they can help her.

If she's the person who makes an impact on the national scene, how willing will she be to give back to the community? How quickly will she sign up to give a lecture, show in a gallery, or help pick the next person Arts United is going to help?

Cultivating individual talents is a relatively low-cost, high-profile way for Arts United to become incredibly relevant to communities of artists (and patrons) that aren't currently being served.



**STEP THREE:**

**PLAY  
NICE.**

The Fort Wayne arts community is roughly divided into two large groups: the big organizations with marketing and development departments and the artists making their own way. Each organization and artist has their own goals, their own ambitions, their own idea of how things should work. Getting all of those organizations to fall in line and pull in the same direction might be impossible. But that shouldn't be the goal here.

**Arts United can turn Fort Wayne into a nationally-recognized arts community simply by getting the Fort Wayne arts community to work together for one initiative, one project, or one night.**

Events like Fortissimo, Starcrossed and Fort Wayne Ballet, Too have been fantastic collaborations between both sides of Fort Wayne's arts community. However, those events don't happen as often as they could because there's a ton of work involved in that sort of collaboration. Most organizations don't have a Director of Innovation position, a person who's put in charge of figuring out how to make things awesome. So, when push comes to shove, people naturally retreat to doing things more in line with their job description.

Arts United can serve as the Director of Innovation for the entire Fort Wayne arts community, seeking out innovations no one else has thought possible and bringing them to life. A new focus on helping the Fort Wayne arts community, not just through funding and infrastructure, but by playing an active hand in the creation of the art that's going to inspire this town, will raise Arts United to a new level of relevancy and importance, not just for principal partners and other organizations, but for anyone who wants to see Fort Wayne continue to be more awesome.



**MARFA OR BUST.**

Marfa, Texas is a small town, less than 2,000 people. For a place that size, it's got a pretty good reputation for art and artists. In 2005, artists Elmgreen and Dagset gave Marfa a Prada store. The doors are always locked, the bags inside have had the bottoms cut out, there are no left shoes in the store, only rights.

Prada Marfa is in the news because the State of Texas is trying to tear it down, saying it's an illegal roadside ad. But the *New York Times* can run stories about the Prada store (and talk about the Marfa arts community in the process) only because the store was built in the first place.

I'm applying for the position of President of Arts United because, while I have no idea what Fort Wayne's Prada Marfa is going to be, I know this is a community that deserves to be relevant on a national level. And I think we'll get there by encouraging larger organizations to step up their game, giving up-and-coming artists the resources and opportunities needed to thrive, and creating environments where innovations have a chance to become revolutions.

Fort Wayne is a city on the verge of something big, but big things don't happen on accident. The Arts Campus, ArtsLab, and ArtsTix are all big things Arts United has made happen in the last few years.

The infrastructure's been built. The stage is set. The artists are present.

**What's the future?**

**Alex Jonathan Brown**  
**September 27, 2013**

**REFERENCES.  
(Both Kinds.)**

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