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ARTPRIZE

ARTPRIZE® SHOWS HOW CROWDSOURCING CREATES GREATER OPENNESS IN ART PATRONAGE AND PRACTICE

September 2, 2014 (New York, NY) – ArtPrize, the radically open international art competition, returns to Grand Rapids, Mich. this September 2014. Since its 2009 inception, ArtPrize has awarded \$3.1 million to 77 artists—making the Michigan based 501c(3) non-profit founded by Rick DeVos one of the largest art awards in the world—a stark contrast to the overall state of arts funding in the US, which allocates the least of any English speaking country in per capita arts spending (according to the NEA’s 2012 funding report). The longevity and success of ArtPrize serves as a reflection of the shift in American arts funding from the public to the private sectors, and as a model for reinventing how the public engages in the arts.

Central to ArtPrize is its massive populist appeal in giving the general public a vote in designating exceptional works of art, a revolutionary divergence from the top-down attitude most commonly taken in the designation of fine art. By making the public’s vote equal to that of the juried vote—a panel of judges comprised of critics, curators and institutional representatives—ArtPrize aspires to raise the stakes of the event and increase local and national dialog about what art is and why it matters.

In addition to the public vote, which anyone attending the competition may participate in online or by app, ArtPrize 2014 will provide a platform for this dialogue through its Critical Discourse series, where art experts and a studio audience will hold town-hall style discussions on topics related to contemporary art. The discussions will be televised live in primetime on the local NBC affiliate in a top 50 media market, a decision crucial for engaging citizens of a country where just about one quarter (26.5 percent) of the adult population visits art galleries or museums at least once a year (according to the Princeton University Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies).

Christian Gaines, ArtPrize Executive Director, explains:

The strength of ArtPrize lies in the often unresolvable tension that exists between public and expert opinion...Critical Discourse will provide a welcome refuge for rigorous, intentional and transformative debate, even as a million conversations about art continue beyond its walls.

These conversations are essential at a time when arts’ funding has taken a long and sustained blow in the wake of the 2007-2009 global recession, with many federal and state agencies receiving drastic reductions in their annual budgets and the altogether elimination of other

programs. (Paradoxically, Michigan continues to see a modest but steady increase in state funding.) Inversely, individual giving to the arts is at its highest since data on subject has been available, reaching \$13 billion in 2012, compared to the NEA's entire annual budget of \$146 million (according to the NEA's 2012 funding report), indicating that present and future artists will rely more heavily on private rather than public funding; an important distinction for arts and culture production, which comprises 2.8 percent of the national GDP at \$504 billion (according to the BEA & NEA's jointly produced 2013 Report on Impact of Arts and Culture on U.S. Economy).

In addition to the limited scope of public funds and the insider access necessary for an artist to obtain private patronage, the art market can be very difficult to penetrate and almost impossible for artists who pursue their practices outside the traditional MFA and gallery representation career track. While the majority of international art competitions require an artist to be nominated by an institution, ArtPrize artists enter themselves and independently organize the exhibition of their work with local venues, a truly grassroots approach when compared to the institutionally curated art award. The success and establishment of several former ArtPrize winners provides alternative examples to the traditional art world success story.

Inaugural ArtPrize Grand Prize winner, Ran Ortner, received the popular vote award for his painting *Open Water no.24* in 2009. Already a professional artist with a full-time painting and sculpture studio practice, Ortner credits winning the cash prize of \$250,000 with giving him the means to implement ideas he had been working towards for years. The artist also cites the immediate aftermath of ArtPrize as the "tipping point" of his career, resulting in a sudden increase in inquiries—receiving up to 250 emails a day—and widespread press coverage in, among other outlets, *The New York Times*, *WSJ*, *BBC* and *NPR*. Since winning ArtPrize, Ortner has undertaken multiple private commissions, including pieces for the iconic New York restaurant *Le Bernardin*, and the United Nations World Water Day Forum at The Hague, Netherlands.

Ortner was enthusiastic about ArtPrize's decision to make the juried and public votes equal for 2014, stating, "ArtPrize is going through an important process with a beginner's mind; that radical humility to re-evaluate yourself constantly, which is what great artists, businesses and individuals do." He applauded the competition's ability to "break down hierarchies and bring art into the larger domain."

Adonna Khare, ArtPrize winner in 2012 for her drawing *Elephants*, experienced a similarly rapid ascent after receiving the award. After taking a full-time position as a K through 6 art teacher, Khare found she had little time for her own art, but entered the competition at the urging of a friend. Khare worked nights and weekends for over a year on the large-scale carbon pencil on paper piece, and took time off to travel to Grand Rapids for the competition. Three intense weeks later she was amazed to see her piece qualify for the Top Ten, with the artist ultimately being named winner of the \$200,000 prize. Attention to Khare's work exploded overnight, with articles in major news outlets, opportunities to show her work all over the country, a Facebook page that

boasts over 11,000 'Likes,' an upcoming first international exhibition in France, and work as a traveling guest speaker.

Although she won the popular and not the juried vote, Khare described what she views as a transition to more critical art world attention. Her inclusion in the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art *State of the Art* exhibition demonstrates broader acceptance in both worlds. The crossover debunks the preconception that a populist, public award would lose merit within the realm of the professional art world, and reinforces the need for alternate avenues for artists working outside the traditional art market.

Mia Tavonatti, Second Place winner in 2010 and Grand Prize winner in 2011 of the popular vote selection for her piece, *Crucifixion*, reiterated this point, explaining how winning the \$250,000 award legitimized her work as an artist and provided funding to her own private art foundation, Svelata, for educating the public and youth about art. Prior to winning ArtPrize, Tavonatti was a professional artist and teacher who supported herself through commissions and reproductions of her paintings and mosaics. ArtPrize served in "clarifying her vision" amidst the huge reaction, both positive and negative, that she received in response to her artwork. Tavonatti was emphatic that the greatest strength of ArtPrize was not in fact the award, but rather the culture being created in the community of Grand Rapids, stating "nobody will ever be able to tell those kids that they can't make art, that art isn't vital and important."

It may come as a surprise that the world's largest art competition occurs annually not in the traditional art world hubs of New York or London, but in the relatively small community of Grand Rapids, in a country often criticized for its anemia in art education and funding. The fact of ArtPrize's existence as such only emphasizes the decentralizing of the art world in the wake of the Global Digital Age and reiterates the role that private groups and organizations will play in feeding America's rich cultural tradition of artistic innovation.

By using the philosophy and technology of crowdsourcing, ArtPrize is able to engage the public in the arts in an unprecedented manner, overcoming traditional barriers to points of entry with 48,000 participants downloading the ArtPrize smartphone-enabled suite of audience involvement tools in 2013. In this manner, technology and the internet is wholly integrated into the live ArtPrize event as an improvement to, rather than replacement of, the in-real-life experience. The public voting module at the centerpiece of the app serves as the ultimate disruption in the status quo of how art is viewed and validated, while also providing the structure and discourse for examining contemporary art, as well as the necessary financial and critical support for the full spectrum of artists who participate. The unlikeliness of its location shows how ArtPrize might model as an approach for other communities interested in nourishing productive creative expression and rewarding artists for their cultural contributions.

ABOUT ArtPrize

ArtPrize is an international art competition open to any artist and decided by public vote. It invites artists to try out new ideas on a large and diverse population of people. It seeks to broaden the

critical dialogue around contemporary art by awarding the world's largest art prize, at \$560,000. Registered artists and venues connect online at www.artprize.org and agree to present the artwork for public display during the 19-day event. ArtPrize 2014 will include 1,537 entries representing 51 countries and 42 U.S. states and territories. ArtPrize 2013 attracted more than 400,000 active participants. Since its inception, individuals of all backgrounds have cast more than 2 million votes for public art. For more information, visit www.artprize.org.

DATES:

September 24 – October 12, 2014

LOCATION:

ArtPrize occupies three square-miles of public and private venues across downtown Grand Rapids, MI. For further venue information, visit www.artprize.org/venues.

MEDIA CONTACT:

A&O

Lainya Magaña, A&O PR
347-395-4155 | lainya@aopublic.com

ARTPRIZE CONTACT:

Jaenell Ott
616-214-7921 | jaenell@artprize.org