

BY JIM HEFFERNAN ('96, '17M)

# ART WITH AN IMPACT


PURPOSEFUL LIVES

**Students' online gallery is  
earning rave reviews for its  
charitable business model**

ART AND CHARITY make good business partners. Some artists produce works specifically for a cause. Others choose to gift the proceeds from a sale to an organization. Still others agree to have their works exhibited, with the host donating a portion of the ticket sales from the event.

Impact Art Gallery, an online gallery launched in October 2016, is taking the charitable business model one step further. For every piece it sells, the gallery donates 30 percent of the proceeds to a nonprofit of the buyer's choice. The artist receives 50 percent and Impact pockets the remaining 20 percent.

"Impact Art Gallery brings artistic creation and our sense of humanity together to change the world for the better," says founder and president Nick Delgado, a JMU senior double majoring in media arts and design and marketing. "We all see things in the world that we feel strongly about improving. Impact gives both art buyers and artists the power to make a real difference."



Impact Art Gallery director Jerry Reese II at a show in Washington, D.C. The company stages exhibitions virtually on its website and occasionally at brick-and-mortar galleries.

PURPOSEFUL LIVES

Generating money for nonprofits is the primary motivation for Delgado and his business partners, JMU senior Jerry Reese II and Holland Corbett of the University of Virginia. To date, Impact’s patrons have raised approximately \$60,000 for their favorite charities, including the American Red Cross, the World Wildlife Fund and St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital.

Reese, the gallery’s director, believes its business model is unique in the art world. “There are plenty of galleries that give to charity, but none to the extent that we are,” he says. “There’s no one out there who is giving back more than they receive.”

Impact’s online gallery showcases hundreds of works by more than 30 international artists, including blue-chip names like Picasso, Warhol and Van Gogh. The company partners with online art publications and stages exhibitions, both virtually on its website and occasionally at brick-and-mortar galleries. Impact has hosted ticketed events in New Jersey, Washington, D.C., and New York City. Additional shows are planned in



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Miami, Los Angeles and London.

“The online platform doesn’t limit the imagination,” Delgado says. “A lot of sales are generated that way. But we’ll keep doing physical exhibitions when we can.”

The business has attracted outside investors and last year was valued at \$1.5 million.

For Delgado and Reese, both of whom were recruited by former Dukes head football coach Everett Withers as nonscholarship players, the art world is a long way from the

gridiron. Reese was a star quarterback at Jefferson Township High School in Oak Ridge, New Jersey, while Delgado was an all-state punter and place-kicker at Oakton High School in Vienna, Virginia. The teammates played only one year together at JMU, but they walked away as friends.

Delgado has always been interested in the visual arts. The summer after his freshman year, he spent several weeks visiting galleries in Paris, where the prospect of launching an online business began to take shape. “I had a few conversations with gallery owners there, and they inspired me to go for it. I felt like it wouldn’t cost much of anything to purchase a website domain and start designing and see where it went. And the people I was talking to thought the charitable aspect was a great idea.”

Reese, a sociology major with a minor in nonprofit studies, approached Delgado about getting involved in the venture. “My big thing is charity,” he says. “I’ve always



**(Above): Reese and Delgado met at JMU as football players. (Left): Delgado talks with a collector. (Right): Reese with his sister, Jasmyne, and mother, Gwen.**

PURPOSEFUL LIVES

wanted to be involved with helping people.”

One of Reese’s sociology professors, Lisa Porter, had noticed the same qualities in him and encouraged him to pursue his passion. “I knew right away that he really cared about social issues and the possibilities for change,” she says. “It was really tugging at his heart.”

Impact built its inventory by seeking out up-and-coming artists—in person, online and via social media—who have a similar social consciousness. “There are a lot of artists who want to help nonprofits,” Delgado says. “They have a voice. That’s why they’re doing what they’re doing. And they want to make a difference.”

These artists are given the option of having Impact represent them exclusively or nonexclusively. “Artists really like having that flexibility,” Delgado says. “It has allowed us to work with higher-caliber artists who maybe only have a few pieces to sell.”

Impact also partners with private collectors to sell paintings by famous artists offline. “These people may have a Picasso or a couple of Warhols in their collection for however

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— **NICK DELGADO**, *founder and president of Impact Art Gallery*

many years, and they’re doing it for investment purposes, mainly,” Delgado says. “It’s all very discreet. But they’re motivated by the same thing—selling the paintings for charity.”

Although the works are displayed online, Impact cultivates personal relationships with potential patrons. “It’s very much person-to-person,” Delgado says. “That’s how the sale happens.”

Some buyers are surprised to learn that college students are behind such a successful venture. “It’s funny; a lot of the time people don’t know our age until we meet them for

the first time,” Delgado says, “but by then it’s past the point where they would care.”

So how do Delgado and Reese balance work and school responsibilities?

“It’s basic time management,” Delgado says. “After football ended, I felt like I had more time than I could possibly need. I think my biggest fear is wasted time. I love lists and checklists, stuff like that. ... It’s usually pretty manageable.”

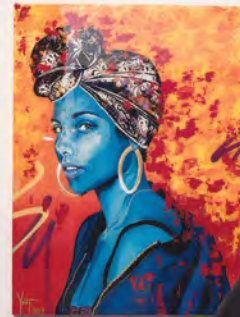
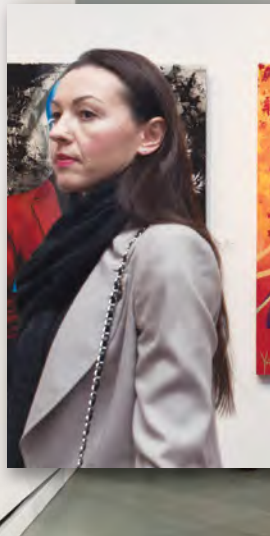
Reese, who is set to graduate in December, says his studies have prepared him to help continue to grow the business.

“I’ve learned the ins and outs of how nonprofits really work,” he says. “And that’s been helpful when I talk to people and they ask about the charitable aspect, how we came up with it and why we’re doing it. It has also helped with negotiations and making those personal connections. It makes [the transaction] feel more real to them and they want to support it that much more.”

Porter says the connections she makes with students like Reese are equally rewarding. “When you have the opportunity to work with students and help steer them into something they’re passionate about, you become the beneficiary of that relationship,” she says. “It has inspired me to dream.”



For more on Impact Art Gallery, go to [impactartgallery.org](http://impactartgallery.org).



Impact Art Gallery hosted an exhibition in New York City in the winter of 2017.