

The art of entrepreneurship

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Marek Sustak (27) ended up in the art world after studying economics and earning a Master's degree in European Governance. Sustak co-founded MAPA, a nomadic online gallery, with a close friend. Despite being a creative thinker, he never could have imagined he would end up working in this field a few years ago.

So how did you end up choosing your degree programme?

My parents are from the Czech Republic. They studied economics and eventually became diplomats, so they travelled a lot. Their degree programme seemed to offer a lot of freedom, so I also decided to study economics. I eventually did a Master's in European Governance because of my fascination with European politics. Ending up in the art world was just a coincidence, but I still apply some of the concepts and strategies I learned at university on a daily basis. As an entrepreneur, an economics degree definitely comes in handy.

So you've travelled a lot. What did you think of Utrecht?

We lived all over the place when I was a kid — it was fun, but it was lonely too. I really found a home in Utrecht. The people, the nature, the architecture, I love it all. I also really enjoyed my days as a student here. I hope to travel a lot more, but I think I'll always be drawn back to Utrecht.

How did you end up in your current job?

I was waiting to hear about a traineeship at the European Commission in late 2020 when my friend Paul Makarov from Latvia approached me with the idea of an online gallery. I immediately loved the idea and didn't have much to do at the time anyway. That's how we ended up founding MAPA. I eventually did a traineeship in Brussels, but I'm an entrepreneur at heart.

What do you enjoy most about your work?

I'm not an artist myself, but I like to think creatively. We're trying to make galleries fairer and more future-proof. I really enjoy that challenge. I also get to meet a lot of interesting and inspiring people through my work.

So what's next?

Startups are always unpredictable, but things have been going really well so far. It's good to take risks when you're still young. I'd love to see MAPA become a major player in the European market. That way, I could combine all my interests in my work. ◀

A longer version of this interview will also be published on DUB, Utrecht University's independent news site. Visit dub.uu.nl for all the latest news and background information on our academic community.



'We're trying to make galleries fairer and more future-proof'



Marek Sustak (27) once dreamed of a future as a diplomat; instead, he found himself drawn to the art world after studying economics and completing a master's in European Governance in 2020; His start-up MAPA helps to showcase emerging artists' work online.