



Grace Cho

**EDITORS' NOTE** *Grace Cho has held her current post since May 2015. Prior to this, she was an operating partner for Advent International, Chief Operating Officer and Executive Vice President of Global Development for Nielsen's Entertainment & Automotive divisions, Managing Director-Strategy and Marketing, for GE Capital, and SVP-Strategic Marketing for GE Commercial Finance. She received her B.S. in Marketing & Communications from Boston College.*

**COMPANY BRIEF** *Orangenius (orangenius.com) was conceived in 2015 as an answer to a fractured art universe. It is an online platform and collaborative community for creatives of all types to show and share work and cultivate a thriving community that brings together creatives and buyers of art. The site aims to unite everyone who is working in the creative economy: individual geniuses, creative professionals, members of an organization, students of the arts, sponsors, and patrons.*

### How did the concept for Orangenius come about?

It came about in multiple ways. I was leading a business at Nielsen that dealt with artists and creatives and trying to protect the work of artists has always proven very difficult. I saw a number of opportunities for building ways to protect the rights of the creator.

I'm also a painter, so I knew that there was no real infrastructure for artists to build their careers around.

I wanted to bring the business skill sets I had gained and apply them to the creative economy. I built a platform to give freelancers, as well as individuals who are part of a larger corporation, the ability and infrastructure to showcase themselves and their work and to build a network.

### How broad is your definition of an artist?

The range is vast so, from a business standpoint, I have to scope it and do it in phases.

Broadly speaking, an artist is anyone who creates something and wants to have their mark on it, from painting to writing to even STEM research.

At this juncture, we're focusing on visual artists, which includes fine artists, digital graphic artists,

# The Creative Economy

An Interview with Grace Cho,  
Chief Executive Officer and Founder, Orangenius

and photographers. We're expanding to all forms of consumer and commercial design as well, such as fashion, architecture, and product.

### How hard is it to capture this market and how are you reaching it?

The first thing I did was try to size up the market, but there was no one who could size it up properly. Being a fragmented market is such a problem because they're all working in silos.

The core platform is to lay a base upon which we can build new layers that will address the specific features and functions that are relevant within a particular visual art space. It's about showcasing oneself as a professional in the creative industry.

The second element is the creation of an inventory of what the artist has accomplished, curating the work, and then recording the necessary details about that work.

Finally, there is value in having the ability to create a portfolio. We call it the dynamic portfolio function in our space.

There is also a multimedia aspect to all of these programs, so artists can attach things like video to their assets online.

### Are you simply providing the service for the artist or also helping educate the artist about this process?

It's a multipronged approach, both for the artists and for the organizations who aggregate artists – we have individual and enterprise models. Organizations can include schools, companies, nonprofits, and those who are aggregating artists for different purposes.

We have built our platform in such a way that it's very intuitive – if one can work an iPhone or iPad, they can work with this, and we have built plenty of educational materials around it.

To supplement all of that, we hold a number of workshops online and in person. We have a publishing arm, our educational portal through *Artrepreneur* and *Art Law Journal*, which provides insights, tools, and resources. For these, we curate relevant content from our partners, and we write original pieces that are “core curriculum” to the business of art. It is our *Wall Street Journal* of art.

### As you've grown the company, how important has it been to build a team around you?

I took my time in building the team. I wanted seasoned people who have gone through the ups and downs of life. Most importantly, each of these people gave up their big jobs for this because of their passion and commitment to the arts. The passion piece is so important. Many of them are artists

themselves and they know the struggle firsthand, but they also bring incredible corporate knowledge.

### Was the entrepreneurial spirit something you knew was a part of you?

I always wanted to create something, but I didn't know how. I also always wanted to be involved in the creative arts. I often found myself in a situation where I would look at a business and I could see raw materials and assets that were unconnected so I would build businesses from concept to launch to \$100-million in eight months. I had a knack for this and was able to repeat it over the years. I always wanted to build a creative business, but it took a lot of courage.

As I looked out at my life for the next 20 years, I realized that I didn't want to have regrets, so I figured, why not try it?

### Will you discuss the significance of the company name?

I wanted to create a name that didn't mean anything to anyone at first. I've always had an affinity for the color orange. As a painter, I knew it was the color of joy and happiness, but when I dug deeper, I found out the name also symbolizes compassion, rising up after adversity, philanthropy, and a positive outlook and optimism. In addition, the “genius” came from the fact that we all want to be a genius at our craft.

### Are you able to take moments to enjoy and appreciate what you have built?

I do that every day. Reflection and gratitude – important forces that guide me in my present and future life. I ask myself constantly, “what did I learn from those experiences?” I built this company because I wanted to surround myself with trusted friends to achieve a goal that we all feel passionate about. We feel passionate about the arts, but also about giving back in the sense that we want our company to give back. We want this to succeed, but a great portion of our success will go back into the arts in the form of scholarships, grants, and foundations.

### How important is it to make sure arts programs in schools are maintained?

I find it disheartening that we're experiencing a loss of appreciation for history, art, literature. There is so much to be learned, and there are too many people getting sucked into the junk media out there. It just takes a few minutes a day to really learn something. I would love to see a general uplift in the level of discourse around the arts.

If I can help people reconnect with that spirit of creativity, be curious, and pursue their creative dreams through our site, I will be fulfilled knowing I left a small legacy. ●