

PROJECT BRIEF  
**ATHENS ERA**



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UGA EM Master's Program

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# Our team



**Kelly May Sheehan**

**&**

**Zoë Phalen**



# Project Pitch

Athens, Georgia is known for its southern culture. Football in Sanford Stadium, outstanding eateries all around, great bars and small shops downtown, and local artists mixed in. But where can you find these artists?

Athens Era acts as a portal to transport the public to local artists online. Through this website, users may explore several works of art that are tied closely to Athens, GA, communicate with artists, help support small businesses, and bring home a piece of Athens with them.

Athens Era is a e-commerce platform that creates a personal experience for users to browse local art and buy it online. This immersive experience is designed to spread the Athens culture farther than before and spotlight local, Athens-based artists in a fun and unique way.

# Definition

Athens Era provides people who love the Classic City with the ability to shop from and discover local Athens artists.

There are a multitude of e-commerce platforms available to those looking to invest in art. However, what if you are also looking to invest in the community? Athens Era is providing that opportunity for Athens neighborhoods. By establishing a platform specifically curated for Athens artists, it has never been easier for buyers to shop locally and support small businesses all while connecting with the community.

# Justification

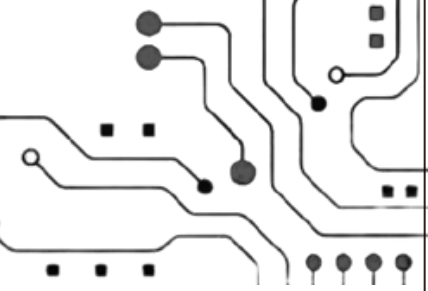
Athens is full of artistic minds wanting to share their creations with likeminded locals. The current avenues for showcasing and discovering local art include browsing local boutique stores and taking a deep dive on global e-commerce sites. Athens Era aims to ease the process of connecting with local artists. Designed for the Athens area, Athens Era will provide a platform for Athens-based artists to maintain a small e-commerce store and communicate with potential buyers. By limiting the audience to Athens neighborhoods and surrounding communities, Athens Era ensures that local artists are receiving the most direct exposure to their intended audiences. By making the platform free to use, Athens Era is also able to ensure that 100% of the proceeds directly benefit the artists and small businesses hosting their shops on the platform. Athens Era will ultimately promote the connections between artist and buyer and establish a greater relationship and appreciation for the Athens community.

# Exploratory Research

Athens Era came into fruition at the realization that there is a lack of a community-oriented and personalized website that truly connects artists and buyers. Popular platforms such as ArtFinder and Etsy greatly inspired the development of Athens Era. The overall functionality and available features of ArtFinder provide a solid foundation of establishing an art-focused website. Features such as Shop Pages, Reviews, Quick Links, and About Pages are loosely incorporated into Athens Era's construction. However, ArtFinder is not as easily accessible for new and just-starting artists as they require a tumultuous application process in order to obtain a 'seller' profile.

Etsy on the other hand is more seller-friendly and boasts significantly fewer restrictions in the process of becoming a seller. The ease and accessibility of Etsy makes it easier for newer artists to create a shop of their work. Additionally, customizable Shop Pages and descriptions allow for sellers to brand their shop and style it according to their own identity. Unfortunately, it is difficult for new artists to stand out in such a densely populated market.

Therefore, by combining the functionality and features of ArtFinder and the usability and personalization of Etsy, Athens Era offers a balanced combination that is both welcoming to new artists and accessible to buyers. Not only do these aspects provide a foundation for Athens Era, but they also provide a means of inspiration for other features, such as in-platform communication (absent in both ArtFinder and Etsy), customizable buyer profiles, and item update notifications.



# Project Technology

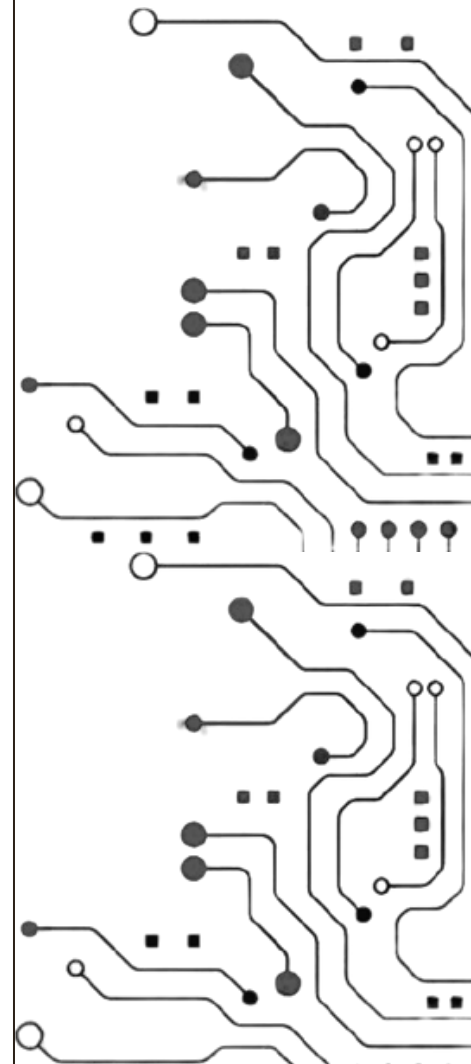
## Tools

Wordpress  
CSS  
Adobe XD  
Plug-ins  
Adobe  
Illustrator

The website will be built on Wordpress and altered with design elements and several plugins for communication and payment features. Logos and graphics will be developed with Adobe applications.

## Website Layout

- Homepage
  - navigation
  - featured artists
  - quick links
- Shop Page
  - filters
  - Gallery view
- Artist Page
  - detailed descriptions
  - contact for commissions or existing pieces
- Community Page
- Account (log-in & join)
  - personalized profile for buyer
  - set up notifications
  - organize saved items
- Checkout





# Features

## Community Page

Athens area events and happenings are displayed in a gallery as a way for users to further get involved with the community

## Shop Page

The user(buyer) will be able to explore all available works on Athens Era with a gallery view and sorting options

## Reviews & Ratings

The user(buyer) is able to leave and view reviews and ratings for each artist with whom they interact

## Custom Profiles

The user(buyer & seller) can maintain and curate their personalized pages and accounts to ease the process of buying and selling

## Product Cards

Each listed artwork will provide a detailed product card completed by the seller in order to relay product information to the buyer

## Mailing List

Athens Era provides an optional email subscription plan in which the user may receive newsletters and messages regarding relevant artwork

## Multi-vendor Transactions

The user(buyer) will be able to purchase art from multiple artists all in the same transaction

# Anticipated Development Milestones

## Alpha

From user research and initial feedback, will have a solid understanding of the market need and how the website will serve its users

## Beta

The website will be moderately developed with lots of experimentation and testing to continue our focus on the user experience.

## 1.0

Here, the website will be fleshed out with features for optimal usability. The site will display proper aesthetic elements to represent the brand.

# Milestones Update

Our journey was not smooth and included a hard pivot. In the beginning, we were set on creating a mobile app for Athens Health and Fitness, a local gym. After some initial user research and meeting with the gym associates, we decided it was not the right path for us. There was not enough interest in the target audience and we wanted to work on a meaningful and impactful project that could outlive our investments. We **pivoted** and landed on our idea for an art marketplace website, where Athens artists and buyers can meet and exchange artwork.

During the creation process, we **ideated** in several different ways. Since our capstone project, Athens Era, is an original brand we crafted, there was much more thought put into its purpose, the problem it solves, and the competitive advantage we wished to produce. To organize and guide our thoughts, I created a brainstorming activity through Figma. This helped immensely with our creative roadblocks. Using different ideation methods, such as mind mapping, optimist/pessimist, and right-braining, I truly challenged my creativity. I learned how to apply several ideation methods to **brainstorming** sessions. I also learned to embrace the constant change of the design process and update our guidelines to stay consistent.

# Milestones Update

## Capstone Project

### Priorities



### If we have time...



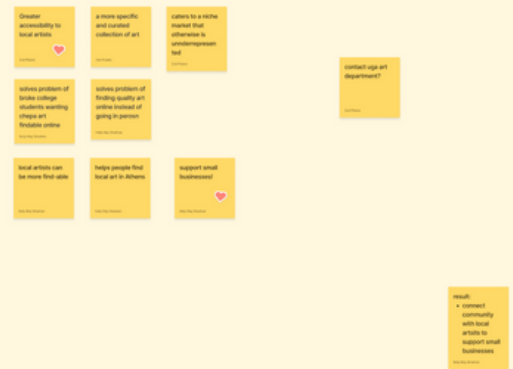
### Brainstorming Techniques if we hit a brick wall:



Sources:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y4kxTCK8d0k>

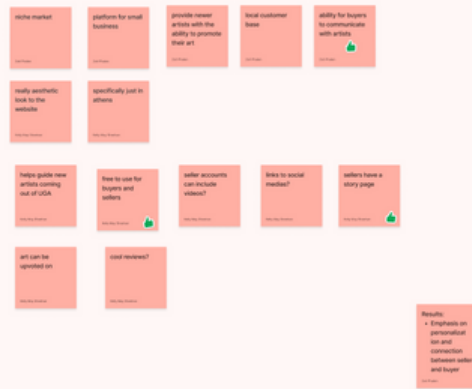
## Topic 1

### Brainstorm prompt 1: The Need/ (what problem do we aim to solve?)



## Topic 2

### Brainstorm prompt 2: Competitive Advantage



## Topic 3

### Brainstorm prompt 3: The Target Market



## Topic 4

### Brainstorm prompt 4: Website Name



## Topic 5

### Brainstorm prompt 5: tone/ vibes ... + color scheme ideas



# Milestones Update

From our project brief, we envisioned a homepage, explore page, artist profile page, and user page. We made some **changes during development**, including:

- Add a join and login page for the artists, rather than for the users
  - users will have less of a roadblock to explore and buy art, which is what we want - an easy experience and a seamless transaction
- Add a community page
  - it resonated with our brand and its goals to support the Athens local community and small artists with tie to Athens.
  - We are pleased with how the community page makes us more than just an e-commerce site, but a community informational and supportive site

The Mini-Merge Presentation was when it all came together. After 4 rounds for **Alpha and Beta iterations**, the Athens Era website was at a completed Beta stage. Using Wordpress, we developed our site with several plug-ins, such as Elementor and Dokan, to build a functional marketplace. I learned the complications that arise when using plug-ins and how to adjust our designs and plans to best serve our project goals.

During development, we received valuable **feedback** that shifted our perspectives to design the site for the two distinct user groups that would use the product: the vendors and the buyers. Even when a product is not complete, or feels up to standards to show off, it's so so SO important to get feedback. User feedback and research is important to understanding our audience on a deeper level to best develop this product. We plan to incorporate more research in our next steps.

# What Lies Ahead

As we move towards 1.0 we will focus on distinguishing between the two separate user journeys: for the artist and buyer.

This involves modifying our user research plan, networking to connect with local artists, conducting user research, and analyzing the results.

With detailed information regarding the user experience, we will develop the website with appropriate images to convey our brand, a more artist-focused layout in the artists page - including artist stories and backgrounds, and a defined process for buying artwork - including expansive policies and procedures for any issues that may arise.

In this stage of development, we expect the E-commerce portion of the website to be our biggest challenge to tackle. Having the right connections and proper layout in the website will be essential for this brand to be successful.

When we reach 1.0, we will launch the trailer, have the website up and running, and produce a poster as well as a medium journal post.

# Competitive Advantage Report

## Market Justification

We initially identified a need for this site through our own experiences. Both of us, being heavily interested and passionate about art and design, determined that there is a disconnect between artists and buyers. Furthermore, the avenues that do exist for artists to promote and sell their art do not typically benefit small artists and those who are just beginning their career in art. On the opposite end, buyers often want to feel a connection to the art that they are buying. This connection stems from a good buyer/seller relationship, opportunities to support small artists, and the chance to foster a greater connection within the community.

While there are numerous e-commerce sites that are considered the 'go-to' for selling and buying art, there has yet to be one that empathizes with the community. That is where Athens Era comes in. Athens Era alleviates the aforementioned pain-points while promoting a more personalized approach to supporting the local Athens art community.

Athens Era is the community-centric approach to art buying and selling. Small and local artists can rest assured knowing that their art is reaching the right audience with no detriment to them. By prioritizing art centered around Athens made by Athens artists, that audience will finally have the ability to truly connect with not only the art but ultimately the Athens community in a profound and personal way.

## Consumer Research

The demographics of our target market are primarily limited by two essential factors: age range and geographical location. The former represents a large spectrum of ages ranging from 18 to 80. This demographic pertains to both the buyers and sellers who will be utilizing Athens Era. While anyone of any age can produce and consume art, a lower limit prevents uncertainty and unprofessionalism from occurring during a transactional process between buyer and seller. The latter directly represents our competitive edge and emphasis on the Athens community specifically. We aim to populate the artist database with Athens locals and residents of surrounding neighborhoods. This ensures that Athens Era's mission to provide current, past, and future Athens residents and those with a connection to the city with the ability to invest in authentic Athens art that comes straight from the source.

One demographic pool that will be utilized in order to populate the aforementioned artist database is that of current and recently graduated art students emerging from UGA, UNG Oconee, and other local programs. Emphasis is placed on this aspect as a manner to provide new artists a platform to begin their career and share their art with those who also hold a similar love and appreciation for Athens.



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# Personas

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Age: 22

Location: Athens,  
GA

Gender: Female

Race: Black

# Anika James



"I came to UGA for the opportunities and abundance of culture. I'm looking to decorate my college apartment with Art I feel connected to."

## Biography

Anika is a young, black female from Georgia who is studying Psychology at UGA. She enjoys the diversity of Athens, loves to stay involved in local events and campus activities. She loves downtown shops but has a hard time finding any local art. She prefers abstract art with a story behind it.

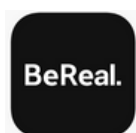
## Goals

- feel inspired and connected to diverse art
- support small businesses
- be unique

## Frustrations

- feeling conformed to society
- feeling unattached from the community

## Frequently Used



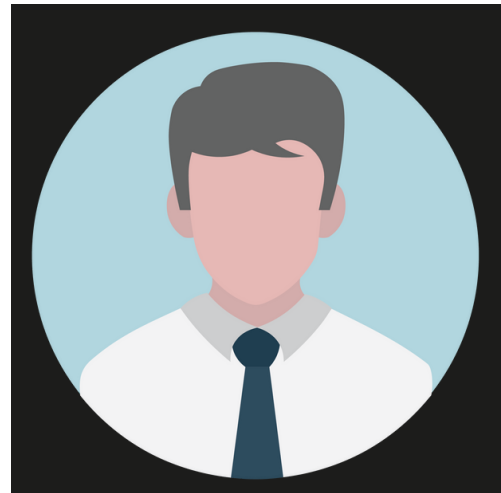
Age: 58

Location: Albany,  
NY

Gender: Male

Race: White

# Gary Holmes



"I've always wanted to develop an art gallery and now that my kids are gone, it's time to refocus on myself. I want to find art that I can relate to from my time at UGA."

## Biography

Gary is an empty nester whose children recently moved out. His hobbies include golf, reading, and house parties. He is entering his sophisticated era and saving for retirement. He wants to redecorate his office and give off a tasteful vibe. He is also a proud alum from UGA and would love to find something that reminds him of the college town.

## Goals

- develop as an art collector and impress guests
- honor his college experience
- be unique

## Frustrations

- finds it hard to express himself
- is inexperienced collecting art or decorating walls
- lonely and feeling disconnected

## Frequently Used



# Product Comparison

## Similar Products

- Local Galleries with online promotion
  - Tiny ATH Gallery
- Online Forum and E-commerce Site for Local Art
  - Artfinder
  - Society6
  - ARTD'HOPE Foundation
  - Saatchi Art
- Local Markets that feature local Athen's Artists:
  - Abnormal Bazaar
  - West Broad Farmer's Market
  - Marigold Market

## Success of Similar Products

- Local Galleries with online promotion
  - Small growth, few features in articles since opening
- Online Forum and E-commerce Site for Local Art
  - Great success, large breath and reach of audience with sellers and buyers
  - Large profits from subscription programs
  - Non-profits funded through government grants and contracts
- Local Markets that feature local Athen's Artists:
  - Good promotion for local artists, but lots of work to go and sell in a physical area, limited reach, small profits for markets and artists

## Our Competitive Advantage

- Function as an online forum and e-commerce site for local art, but only specific to the Athens Community
- Larger reach and ease for artists
- Greater accessibility for the public compared to physical options in Athens

# Competitor Research



## Tiny ATH Gallery

- Description: website for Athen's artists to join a network of local artists with a promotional agenda and space for displays, physical gallery in Athens, GA for events
  - subscription mailing list
  - provides social media marketing campaign for the featured artist of the month, Instagram: @tinyathgallery, Live Artist Talks
  - Host events and markets for local Athen's artists to come promote and sell their art
  - Focus on spotlighting one artist / group each month
- Features:
  - Artist Submission Form
  - Home, Learn, Events, Artists, About, Log In, shopping cart
- Numbers:
  - product prices vary, free to the public to visit, undisclosed charged percentage to artists for selling, no promos, had 12 artists at last documented live gallery showing
  - Founded: Sept 2019
- Target Market: Athens community
- Distribution: In-person/ physical buying setting
- Appearance:
  - Overall: simple, scattered, boxy
  - Colors: white, black, maroon/ deep red
- Keywords: "The mission of tiny ATH gallery is to provide a local-artists-first platform to promote Athens' amazing community of artists. Our focus is on artists: exhibiting their work in a small-but-beautiful space, promoting the work with professional marketing, and bringing the community together."
- Reviews: "intimate space", "great vibe", 3.8/5 on Google

# Competitor Research

## Artfinder

# Artfinder

- Description: website that aims to "make art sustainable, accessible, affordable, and a joy to discover, while supporting artists to make a living doing what they love"
  - marketing within their website, invite contacts, Google Ads
  - Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn
- Features:
  - Homepage: featured artists, quick links, shop by category, editor's pick, gift ideas, popular, reviews
  - Shop Page
  - Inspiration Page
  - About Page
  - Join/ Login and shopping cart: you must apply to sell, so more exclusive! ... intense application process
- Numbers:
  - 108 countries, 500,000 buyers, 10,000 artists, 15,000 new artworks added every month, 40%-33% commission fee, starter v.s professional account is free v.s %-12 monthly charge, product prices vary depending on artist's preference
  - Promos: 10% full price, 15% off full price of %595+, Up to 50% off selected artworks
  - Founded: 2010
- Target Market: local artists and online buyers
- Distribution: international shipping
- Appearance:
  - Overall: clean, colorful, bold, credible, sharp corners, WordPress template
  - Colors: navy, bright red, teal, white, light blue, pale yellow
- Keywords: "the art marketplace", "buy original art online", "independent artist", "wall art, original paintings, sculptures, ..."
- Reviews: mostly positive experience, well trusted

# Competitor Websites

The screenshot shows the top portion of the tinyATH GALLERY website. At the top center is the logo, which consists of the word "tiny" in a lowercase, black, sans-serif font, followed by "ATH" in a large, bold, red, sans-serif font, and "GALLERY" in a smaller, black, sans-serif font below it. To the right of the logo are social media icons for Instagram and Facebook. Further right are icons for a shopping cart (with a "0" next to it) and a user profile (with "Log In" text next to it). Below the logo is a black button with the text "Artist Submission Form" in white. Underneath that is a navigation menu with links for "home", "learn", "events", "artists", and "about". The hero section features three images: on the left, a photograph of a modern building with large windows and a covered walkway; in the center, a photograph of a large, classical-style building with a prominent green dome; on the right, a dark grey t-shirt with a large pink circle on the front containing the "tinyATH GALLERY" logo. Below the images are two buttons: a pink one labeled "upcoming exhibitions" and a black one labeled "in the news". Below the "in the news" button is a white box containing the text "Flagpole Calendar Pick: Jason Machen".

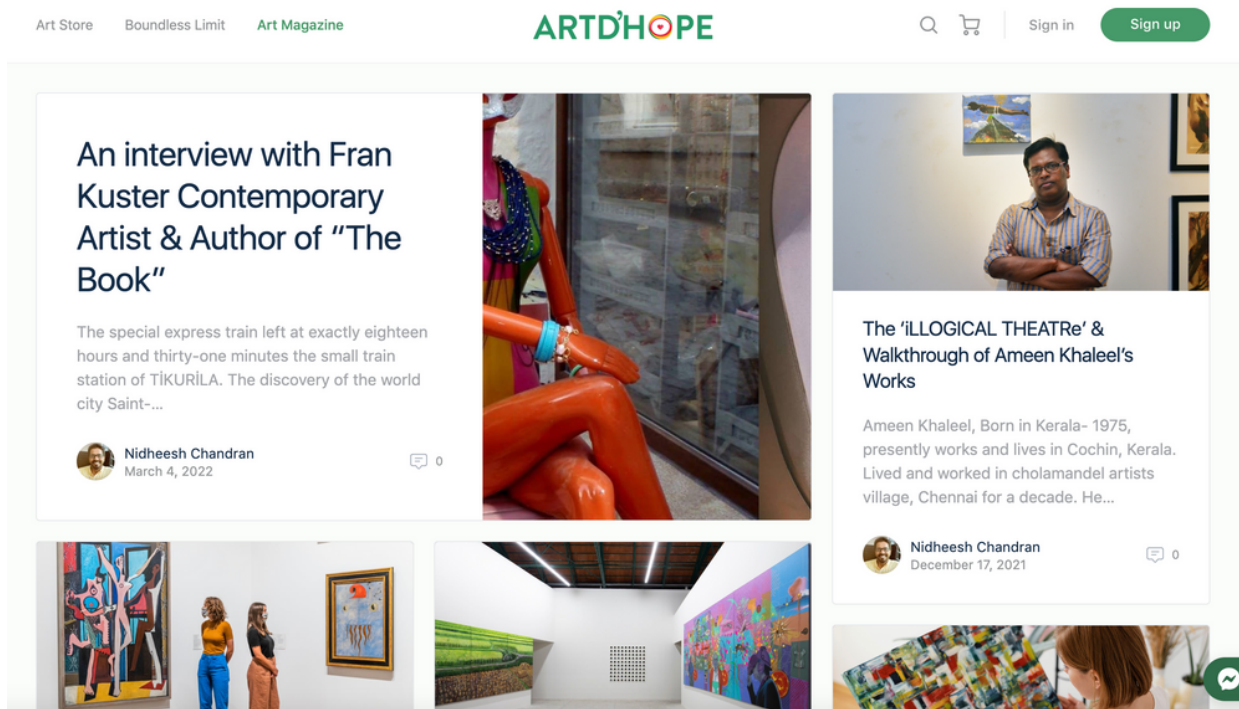
The screenshot shows the top portion of the Artfinder website. At the top is a dark blue header bar with the text "10% off full price art: BOO10" on the left and "See offers" with a downward arrow on the right. Below this is a white navigation bar with the "Artfinder" logo in red on the left, followed by "Shop" and "Inspiration" in black. On the right side of the navigation bar are "Earn \$30", a search icon, "About", "Join or Login", and a shopping cart icon. The main hero section features a large blue banner on the left with the text "International Artists Day" in bold black font. Below this text is a paragraph: "Today is a celebration of our artists and the joy they bring through their art. We asked them, what is it like to be an artist?" and a red "Read more" button. To the right of the banner is a large, colorful, abstract portrait of a smiling woman's face. Below the banner are three columns of text, each with an icon: a picture icon for "Authentic, hand-crafted art" (Shop original, unique and affordable art from thousands of artists around the world.), a person icon for "Support independent artists" (Buy directly from an artist, helping them to make a living doing what they love.), and a truck icon for "Risk-free shopping" (Secure transactions, free 14-day returns. Full peace of mind, guaranteed.). Below these columns is a large white box with the text "Shop original art from independent artists around the world." At the bottom is a red footer bar with the text "No tricks, just up to 15% off this halloween" and "10% off full price: BOO10 · 15% off \$595+: BOO15 · Ends 1st November · Terms".

# Competitor Research

## ARTD'HOPE Foundation



- Description: website for an association of artists and a non-profit organization to connect independent artists with art lovers, artist profile, buyers create an account, they have a focus on storytelling in Magazine Page
- Features:
  - Homepage: join network, create portfolio if artist, info, instagram link, FAQs
  - Art Store Page
  - Boundless Limit Page: Real international art exhibition to auction real art as NFTs through video and VR experience
  - Magazine: showcases art with their stories in article format
- Numbers: varied prices, non-profit setup for free use, they ask artists to donate part of their profits or have an additional fee added on for Artd'hope to keep
- Target Market: all types of artists and art buyers
- Distribution: international shipping
- Appearance:
  - Overall: light, airy, nice, soft, rounded corners, WordPress template
  - Colors: soft medium green, bright orange, soft medium pink, navy, light mint
- Keywords: "the global art community of artists"
- Reviews: positive remarks, 5.0 stars on Google





# Conclusion

Athens Era is a community-focused, online art platform that truly curates a personal experience for all involved. Not only do local artists and small business now have the platform to share and promote their love of Athens through art, but buyers have the ability to connect even deeper to the Classic City. Fostering a personalized experience with small businesses in mind, Athens Era is the first of its kind to cater to the community.

At completion, Athens Era will host a wide array of local artists that share a love for Athens. Artists may tailor their page to best represent their collection as a whole through a variety of features such as artist descriptions/backgrounds and product listings that may include photos and/or videos. These artists will also have the ability to establish positive customer relationships through in-platform communication. This in turn can generate a greater likelihood of customer reviews and ratings that only boost the artist's business, all while being reminded of the common ground that both artist and buyer share: a true love and appreciation for Athens.