

IN PERSON

Lobby Art Raises Funds for Research

By [Diane McLaughlin](#) | Banker & Tradesman Staff | Mar 27, 2022 | [Reprints](#) | [Unlock Link](#) | [Print](#)**Eliane Markoff****Co-Founder, Art in Giving****Age:** 67**Foundation launched:** 1999

When Boston Private wanted to present board members and some clients with a copy of an artwork several years ago, they turned to Art in Giving to create the print. Co-founded by Eliane and Gary Markoff, Art in Giving is an online gallery that raises money for pediatric cancer research by selling art to commercial real estate firms and other companies. Half of the proceeds go to the artist and the other half goes to the Rachel Molly Markoff Foundation, which provides research grants in memory of the Markoffs' 9-year-old daughter, who died of a brain tumor in 1992.

Eliane Markoff, who works as an ombudsperson at Bentley University, began painting as therapy after her daughter died, and the connections she made with other artists led to the idea for Art in Giving. Commercial real estate firms have also purchased artworks for their buildings, including BioMed Realty, Alexandria Real Estate Equities and Marcus Partners. Jon Davis of The Davis Cos. was one of Art in Giving's first clients.

Q: How did you come up with the idea for Art in Giving?

A: My very first show was at Quebrada Baking Co. in Wellesley, and I had maybe 16 watercolors there, and we ended up selling most of them, which obviously gave me a lot of confidence in the art. But also, I think people knew my story; I think it resonated with them that I painted for therapeutic reasons. After that, I ended up joining the SoWa Boston club. I had a very tough time taking the money, so all the money that I raised from selling the paintings went to a cause: pediatric cancer research.

Some of the artists offered to donate pieces for an auction, and so many of them came to me that I decided to approach a couple of companies and see if they would be interested in buying the art from us. I put together a small business plan, and I presented it to a couple of people, including Bob Coughlin, who was president of MassBio at the time. He loved the idea, and he introduced us to people at Sanofi Genzyme. They ended up buying 42 paintings for 650 Memorial Dr. from the gallery. For us, that was a huge turning point. And once Sanofi Genzyme did that, Alexandria Real Estate and BioMed Realty learned about us, and we collaborated with them. They are very supportive of the gallery, and when they have to buy something or loan art, they always come to us.

Q: How do you find artists who want to be part of this program?

A: At the beginning, when I was at SoWa, anyone who came to me and said they wanted to be part of Art in Giving, we added them to the site. Then we ended up engaging two curators who helped us with curating offices, and they said we have to be much more selective. Now we have a process, and people have to be approved. Almost everyone on our site has an art background. This is their full-time job.

Q: Do the artists end up receiving less by selling their work through Art in Giving?

A: If you're represented by galleries, the gallery keeps 50 percent, and the artist keeps 50 percent. When I first started Art in Giving, I thought 25 percent for Art in Giving would be great. And one of the artists said, "But I'm represented by a gallery on Newbury Street, and they take 50 percent, and they don't have a cause like you do." That's how it became 50 percent. Now, if you're represented by a gallery on Newbury Street, you probably get much more visibility than Art in Giving, because we don't have the capacity to do PR, to advertise. We don't have a staff; we're just all volunteers.

Q: How much do the pieces usually sell for?

A: It's such a wide range, but most of the paintings we sell are between \$4,000 and \$6,000. We just delivered a mosaic [made by Markoff's daughter, Audrey] that's \$5,500, and that's usually about an average of what we sell.

Q: How has working with commercial real estate firms helped the program?

A: Working with real estate companies like Alexandria and BioMed has created the growth that we've experienced with Art in Giving. With real estate companies, we also loan the art. With Alexandria in Technology Square in Cambridge, they display between seven and 10 pieces every year, and they rotate the pieces. They give a significant amount of money to the foundation. It's not a purchase; it's just a loan to display the art and to show their tenants that they're supporting a gallery that supports pediatric cancer research, which resonates with the tenants, because they're all in life sciences. The money raised is much greater for the foundation than a sale because with a loan, the artist gets a stipend that's less than 50 percent.

Q: How does the foundation's business model help pediatric cancer research?

A: There hasn't been much progress made for brainstem gliomas. If a child is diagnosed with a brainstem glioma today, chances are they will not live more than one year. That's very, very sad. With a lot of other cancers, they've made much more progress. The [National Institutes of Health] does not give money for very, very basic, out-of-the-box research. We go after the basic research and give grants to researchers who cannot get grants from NIH. Someone has to have a novel idea, because that's really where the progress is going to take place – when someone does something extremely disruptive, different than what has been done in the past. One of our researchers that we funded was able to prove a concept with the money we gave him that allowed him to gain a multi-million-dollar grant from the NIH. But without that small funding of basic research, he would not have been able to gain that.

Q: How much has the foundation raised?

A: We just reached the \$2 million mark. We don't raise millions of dollars every year. We do get some donations, usually less than \$45,000 a year. Most of the money does come from the sale or the loan of the art.

Five of Markoff's Favorite Things

- Author: William J. Coughlin
- TV show: "Columbo"
- Movie: "Casablanca"
- Vacation spot: Bermuda
- Game: Backgammon

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