Upstart Co-Lab investor coalition commits to shift capital to creatives

ImpactAlpha, June 25 – Upstart Co-Lab has been a chief evangelist of the power of art, design, culture, heritage, and creativity to drive impact. The five-year-old non-profit led by Laura Callanan has made the business case for investments in the creative economy, which in the U.S. amount to $878 billion.

Now, 10 institutions and individuals with $1 billion in impact investing assets are joining an Upstart-led coalition with three-year commitments to moving capital to creatives. “Art and culture have been largely overlooked by impact investors before now,” said Darren Walker of Ford Foundation, which supports Upstart. “The creative economy has a critical role to play in an equitable COVID-19 economic recovery and needs values-aligned capital more than ever.”
• **Creative capital.** Members include Bonfils-Stanton Foundation, Creative Capital, and Jessie Ball duPont Fund. The group also includes impact investor Lorrie Meyercord and art dealer Martha J. Fleischman. Upstart has helped mobilize more than $11 million in impact capital for the creative economy, including more than $6 million for LISC’s NYC Inclusive Creative Economy Fund. Upstart helped Souls Grown Deep Foundation develop a strategy to invest the bulk of its endowment in racial justice and creativity in nine southern states.

• **Racial lens.** A narrow focus on arts and culture fails to recognize the “creative economy as an on-ramp to wealth building for entrepreneurs, including women, people of color and others who benefit from lower barriers to entry to a sector of the economy more interested in merit than advanced degrees and pedigrees,” Callanan wrote in an earlier essay. Upstart has built a pipeline of more than 150 investment opportunities in sustainable food, ethical fashion, social impact media, creative places and other creative industries. A 2018 report identified more than 100 funds investing in the creative economy.