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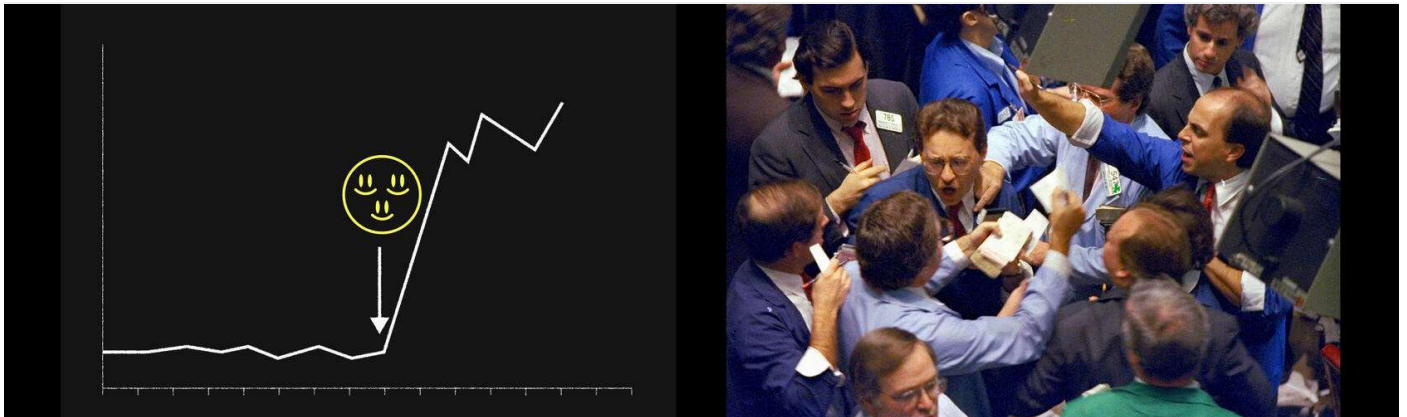
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## Can A-Corps Save the Struggling Artist?

Metalabel – an indie platform celebrated for its anti-scale ethos – is betting big on a new corporate law that will allow artists to game the system

L BY LOUIS BURY IN OPINION | 29 SEP 25



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Since its launch in 2024, Metalabel, a new platform for the release of creative work with a subcultural bent, has made ripples in the larger culture. Its cult hit *The Dark Forest Anthology of the Internet* (2024), a book authored by the Dark Forest Collective, captured the sense of fatigue that many had been feeling around 2010s-style social media as they retreated into gatekept digital spaces such as group chats and Discord servers. The group's 2025 follow-up, Nadia Asparouhova's *Antimemetics: Why Some Ideas Resist Spreading*, examined how certain consequential ideas take longer for culture to process and received coverage in [Artnet News](#) and [The New Yorker](#). Metalabel's wider catalogue, filled with quirky zines and bite-sized artworks, embodies this underground ethos – browsing it feels like visiting an indie record store or a small press book fair.

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*The Dark Forest Anthology of the Internet* (2024). Courtesy: Metalabel and Yancey Strickler.

On the heels of its early successes, Metalabel has begun to think bigger. Not long after *Antimemetics* was published, the platform announced its idea for Artist Corporations, or A-Corps, an oxymoronic-sounding initiative to pass a law in the US, potentially as early as 2026, that would establish a new corporate form that artists can adopt. This autumn, Metalabel plans to announce the Dark Forest Operating System (DFOS), a private social media app (another seeming oxymoron) with the potential to serve as the underlying structure of Metalabel or even A-Corps. Metalabel calls these two initiatives ‘releases’, as they do the publication of a zine or work of sound art, but A-Corps and DFOS are bids to revamp artists’ economic and organizational toolkits rather than artworks in their own right.

The irony of Metalabel’s expansion plan is that the platform has made its name through scepticism regarding the cultural imperative to scale up. In addition to theorizing antimemetics, Metalabel has been reluctant to understand artistic value through the lens of metrics like follower counts and sales volume, a phenomenon that art critic Ben Davis has called ‘quantitative aesthetics’. Instead, each Metalabel release is available as a limited and numbered edition, in part to foster a sense of scarcity and in part because the platform curates work – for instance, Guillermo Gutiérrez Arribas’s *Politopoly* (2025), a pastiche of the board game *Monopoly* inspired by the crisis in affordable housing – unlikely to have a mass audience anyway.

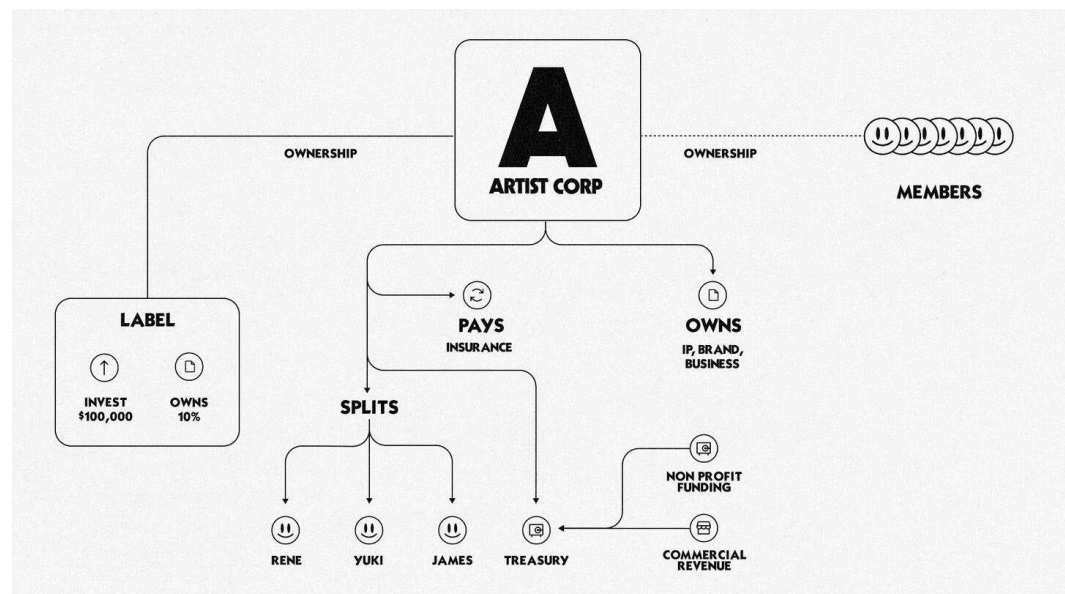


*Politopoly* (2025) by Guillermo Gutiérrez Arribas. Courtesy: Metalabel and Yancey Strickler.



Metalabel's embrace of artistic collectives also departs from the individualism predominant in the cultural mainstream. *The Dark Forest Anthology* concludes with an essay by Metalabel co-founder and director – and former Kickstarter CEO – Yancey Strickler called 'The Post-Individual'. The text prophesies, in the label's shaggy house style, that after two decades of everybody-for-themselves digital content creation, in which building a personal brand has been paramount, 'internet-based groups will increasingly be how social value and power are attained'. The Metalabel platform thus allows collectives to implement custom revenue splits to help reduce back-end sales friction among members.

Such tools, and the values underpinning them, are refreshing counterweights to the attention economy's tendencies towards social atomization and insipidly optimized content. Still, an artistic collective is quite different from a corporation, and the latter c-word is likely to raise hackles among many of its intended beneficiaries. In an **April 2025 TED Talk**, Strickler acknowledges this antipathy yet nonetheless argues: 'Right now, creative people are excluded from the full benefits of capitalism. Artist Corporations will treat them as real economic actors for the first time.' The basic idea behind an A-Corp is that the founding owners can build equity if and when the value of their intellectual property grows, issuing shares to outside investors rather than selling off the full rights to their work. The A-Corp structure would also allow owners to access non-profit funding and enable multiple ownership groups to pool together and purchase benefits such as healthcare.



A-Corp diagram. Courtesy: Metalabel and Yancey Strickler.

Should A-Corps become a new legal entity, they will no doubt benefit the 13 per cent of artists who, according to a statistic Strickler cites in his TED Talk, support themselves predominantly through their artwork. A-Corps may even push up that number by a meaningful amount, as artists leverage collectivist structures to unlock their work's previously uncaptured monetary value. But A-Corps won't solve the root financial problem for most artists, which is that the market for their work isn't sufficiently large for them to make a living and is unlikely to grow enough for that to become possible in future. A-Corps are a capitalistic answer to the economic and social ills artists experience under capitalism. Switching from an LLC or 501(c)(3) to an A-Corp model is a bit like a gambler switching from roulette or slot machines to blackjack: no matter the game, the odds are still stacked against you.

At this early stage in its development, Metalabel's unresolved tension is that it appears to be playing two games at once, whose values point in different directions. On one hand, its small-run releases of print materials, new media and art and design objects manifest a subcultural ethos, one that champions not just collectivist art-making but also affordable art collecting. On the other hand, its big, systems-level releases manifest a tech start-up ethos, which historically has inclined towards the unbridled pursuit of growth. The fit between these two value systems feels uneasy, if not contradictory.



Press still from the April 2025 TED talk announcing Artist Corporation. Courtesy: Metalabel and Yancey Strickler.

Metalabel's wager is that its apparent contradictions are more like paradoxes; that underground cultural communities aren't fundamentally incompatible with market capitalism, just unlikely bedfellows. This bet, equal parts foolish and inspired, won't cure everything that ails creative industries such as visual art and music, but will serve as a test of the extent to which early-21st-century cultural economics, so dependent on digital scale, can maintain subcultural values. I'm rooting for Metalabel and for all the artists, big and small, working to tilt the odds a bit more in their favour, even if the larger system may remain unable to support most people's capacity to make a living off the game.

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