

RETAIN. VALUE. PROMOTE. A CASE FOR SUPPORT OF WOMEN WORKING IN
NONPROFIT ARTS ADMINISTRATION

Hannah Church

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Reading Committee:

Tony Montenieri, Faculty Advisor

Ramona Baker, MAAA Director

Gregory Charleston, Major Paper Director

Mary Margaret Schoenfeld, Reader

Ava Morgan, Editor

"The women of today are the thoughts of their mothers and grandmothers, embodied and made alive. They are active, capable, determined and bound to win. They have one-thousand generations back of them... Millions of women dead and gone are speaking through us today"

— Matilda Joselyn Gage

"Women belong in all places where decisions are being made. It shouldn't be that women are the exception."

— Ruth Bader Ginsburg

"Each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it possibly, without claiming it, she stands up for all women."

— Maya Angelou

Forward

A woman's right to make decisions about her body and life choices was taken away in June of 2022 by the United States Supreme Court via the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision. This landmark decision held that the right to an abortion is no longer protected by the United States Constitution. This led to abortion becoming illegal, no matter the circumstance or health of the mother or child, in twelve states. Additionally, twelve states have hostile laws about abortion and three states have access but no legal protection for women who seek an abortion or medical professionals that provide them according to the Center for Reproductive Rights ("Roe v. Wade").

Some national corporations took immediate action in the days and weeks following the ruling for their employees by offering to cover travel costs for anyone going out of state to find legal access to an abortion and gender affirming medical care (Hagelgans and Basi). Many companies stayed silent including nonprofit arts organizations.

At the time of the *Dobbs v. Jackson* Supreme Court decision in June of 2022, I was working in a mid-level administrative role at a national theater that prides itself on presenting American Theater. Artistic leadership of the theater communicated to senior staff that they were devastated by the Supreme Court decision and wanted to make a theater piece about choices women make. The senior staff was composed of only 8 of the over 100 people that worked in administrative roles for the organization. Word got out about the plan for a show that would address the Supreme Court decision. I was personally disheartened that there was no statement from leadership or human resources to the staff to acknowledge the issue and that efforts were instead being placed toward a performance.

As an employee that could get pregnant and needs reproductive care, I submitted my concerns about the lack of response and support to staff to the anonymous suggestion box. I found out my suggestion was received when leadership reached out to senior staff the next day and asked them not to share information about the show until it was official. The email from leadership stated, "people are clearly engaged. We just want to make sure they have the right information."

The show was put into action by August of 2022 and premiered in October of 2022 with 18 performances leading up to the midterm elections. The nationwide reach of this project was impressive and I do not wish to diminish the importance and success of the show. As a female staff member, I was disappointed that artistic leadership took it upon themselves to produce a

show in response to a national human rights issue rather than taking any time to acknowledge the staff made of over 60% women in a time when fundamental human rights had been taken away from women. The run of 18 performances was added into an already planned and marketed season and was not cheap or budgeted for in the annual budget. If there is money to produce a show out of the blue, then there is money to support the staff in the many ways this paper will address.

Advocacy for women's rights is not a new subject and yet the fight continues. Each generation faces a new challenge and the community builds on the work done by generations that risked everything to get here today. Now is the time to share the stories, keep the door open and extend any help to those who are ready to keep fighting for the right for women to thrive professionally in arts administration and exist in peace.

Introduction

Retention of the female workforce in arts administrative positions is integral to the continuation of successfully run organizations. These are clear steps organizations can take to ensure there is internal work with policy changes that reflect the current socio-political moment where women's rights are advocated for, institutional support that provides resources to grow the leadership pipeline for women, and pay equity across genders. Nonprofit arts organizations need proactive policies and resources to support and protect women to retain, value, and promote women working in the arts.

This paper will identify ways to retain and value women working in arts organizations through the development of support at all levels of employment to encourage and ensure long and healthy careers in the arts. Arts organizations must examine the internal practices and

humanize the experiences of employees so that recruitment and retention honors human experience and not just what the organization needs. By auditing internal communications, hiring practices, and historically patriarchal and misogynistic policies throughout organization structure, arts organizations create and sustain work environments that support women. Reactive changes to flashpoints in living history do not reduce harm and women have historically experienced enough harm in the workplace and in the world.

In the last century in the United States, there have been major events surrounding human rights. In the 60s and 70s major legislation was being passed. In 1960 the Food and Drug Administration approved the first commercially produced birth control pill. In 1964 the Civil Rights Act became law. In 1972 the Supreme Court decision of *Eisenstadt v. Baird* gave the right for unmarried individuals to have the right to use contraception. One year later, the Supreme Court voted to recognize the right to abortion in the historic *Roe v. Wade* decision. Nearly fifty years later, this was overturned by the 2022 ruling of the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*.

The Equal Rights Amendment was first introduced in 1923 as an amendment to claim men and women have equal rights throughout the United States. It was rewritten in 1943 by Alice Paul to state, "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on the account of sex." ("Equal Rights Amendment") This version passed the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives on March 22, 1972, and was sent to the states for ratification as the proposed 27th Amendment to the Constitution. The Equal Rights Amendment did not get enough state votes and was reintroduced before Congress in 1982 and has, since then, been introduced before every session of Congress. In January 2020, Virginia

became the 38th state to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment and it was brought back to Congress (Colohan et al.).

The international women's rights movement dates back to the mid-1800s. Incredibly difficult and positive work has been done by many people fighting for the right for women to belong and be treated fairly at work and in this country. Advocates of today are taking the knowledge of the pioneers before them to continue in the fight for women's rights and equality. This continues to be a national issue that has ripple effects throughout all professional fields.

Studies have shown that women working in arts administration are still grossly underpaid compared to their male counterparts and struggle to climb the ranks due to misogynistic policies, structures, and pay scales holding women back (Hegewisch et al.). Support and retention of women working in the arts takes conscious work and organizations must focus on how they communicate as an institution to the staff, board of directors, and community. In addition, the infrastructure of arts organizations needs to shift with efforts to better value the time and expertise of the staff. Finally, at the most basic level of need, arts organizations must pay the staff equitably as women continue to be underpaid in the field today (Hegewisch et al.). The arts field at large can do better and there are many ways arts organizations can change in the important effort to retain, value, and promote women working in arts administration.

For this study, a woman or female is defined as someone who identifies as a woman or female and/or can get pregnant and would need reproductive care. This does not negate the multiple identities a body can hold and recognizes that the fluidity and intersectionality of each individual is vast.

Institutional Support and Internal Communication for Staff

Organizations must be intentionally people-centered to invest resources in the staff and therefore the women working for the organization. By investigating institutional support and communication structures, organizations ensure all employees know their rights and outlets for communication to management. These processes provide the basic support resources for employees while also considering how to tap into the human experience to better value and retain their staff.

The 2022 Artnet News op-ed titled, *“In the Past Two Years, Museums Have Finally Started Hiring Black Women for Top Jobs. Why Are so Many Already Leaving?”* Lise Ragbir talks about how many women of color recently promoted to museum leadership positions left within a year due to issues of support and value for the women. Ragbir says, "It takes ongoing institutional support to create true change." Ragbir goes on to talk about how exciting it was to see so many women of color being promoted to leadership roles at institutions such as the Guggenheim, Pace Gallery, the National Endowment for the Arts, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, The Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston, and more. When these women were hired, there were press releases (Smith) and news articles to celebrate and show change was happening but within a year many of these same women had resigned or were forced out with very little said by the organizations and a little coverage in the news. Ragbir points to a lack of institutional support for these new hires.

The women Ragbir wrote about had impressive resumes and belonged in executive arts administration roles but were not met with the conditions to thrive in those positions. Several were not treated as leaders and were hired as a blanket solution to decades of racial and gender inequity. There was little to no internal change or dialogue and these women were expected to suddenly fix everything in the first year. "The first year is about aligning strides and building

trust,” reflects Ragbir, “and the support of the people who hired you is a critical part of that alignment. Change-making is hard, even with the trust and support of your colleagues.”

When considering the human experience in a working environment, arts organizations must make sure that everyone not only feels welcome but supported to exercise their skills and apply their expertise. Businesses can build the conditions for women to feel welcome at the table as staff, board, leaders, and community voices. This begins with internal dialogue and opportunities to hold space, not only in times of change and crisis but also in daily practices. Erica Lynette Edwards of the arts consulting group, Cultivating Better Tomorrows says, "Don't expect acceptance, demand inclusion" (Vostrikov). The women who are breaking the glass ceilings are demanding inclusion and leaving the doors open for more women to follow in their footsteps.

A study by the American Association of Museum Directors shows the arts have led the example with women in leadership roles but this often means representation at organizations with smaller budgets and a lack of leadership pipeline for women to succeed (Trevino). Infrastructure changes can be made to ensure women are included at all levels and not only in leadership roles. Arts organizations will need to rethink the way they do business and have the institutional courage to change and possibly fail. Arts organizations are in a moment where much greater risks with internal work will encourage change that will have lasting effects in the art world. Decades of exclusionary practices cannot be changed overnight (Ragbir).

The important internal work that leaves lasting change and supports all employees is on display in a shining example at Pacific Northwest Ballet (PNB) in Seattle, WA. Individual employees of PNB have experienced personal support from leadership that has shown a level of care and human connection that goes so much farther than a blanket statement of support or the

silence most arts administrators receive in times of crisis. The Executive Director, Ellen Walker, not only has an open-door policy but also has a record of reaching out to individuals in the organization during trying times.

In a personal interview with Lili Pigott, an employee of PNB, said, "Ellen is always thinking about the individual people....When everything is happening in the media or relating to personnel concerns," reflects Pigott, "people are listened to and things are solved." When considering retention and promotion of employees, PNB has proved over and over that it is a place that values its employees. Several employees come back to PNB after leaving for other work opportunities because of the people and organizational culture. PNB is a nonprofit arts organization with over 400 full-time and part-time employees and Ellen Walker goes out of her way to make sure she introduces herself to new employees and arranges meetings with individual teams with new hires. Ellen's leadership style at PNB is an excellent example of open internal communication and proven dedication to the needs and wants of the administrative and artistic staff.

Though it is not required for nonprofit arts organizations to make a public stand on social justice and political movements, the past several years have demonstrated to patrons and donors how impactful it is when a beloved organization makes a public statement, shows support for its staff, and commits to making long term changes. Bearing this knowledge, arts administrators have to ask why organizations are willing to produce shows and exhibitions in response to socio-political issues but not address the staff, make space for conversation, and investigate internal policy changes about the same issues.

Change takes courage and long-term dedication and many organizations are still responding to the call to action of the Black Lives Matter movement of 2020 and the aftermath

of the COVID-19 pandemic. Diversity, equity, inclusion, and access mean everyone is considered and respected in the workplace and the support of women is part of that conversation. As arts organizations dig into this difficult work, leadership will need to begin assessing internal operations and structure. This includes hiring practices, Board development, and providing support for staff to succeed.

Internal Operations and Structure

Simple changes to organization policies can significantly enhance the quality of life of staff for long-term retention. Examples of this might include when organizations both large and small opt to close for a designated week or two to give all staff paid time off in addition to the vacation and leave time they may elect to use throughout the year. By announcing publicly that a business is closed until a certain date, leadership allows the staff to fully unplug and relax. The choice to close the entire organization provides employees time to take care of their mental and physical health. This shift in operational structure reflects a more people-centered work environment and is being adopted by arts organizations of various sizes.

Dance Place, a medium-sized performing arts organization in Washington, DC, closes for a week at the end of the calendar year and the start of the new fiscal year during the summer. This effort gives everyone a chance to rest and recharge without the internalized guilt of unanswered emails. Dance Place helped their staff by posting the closure on social media creating an all-staff email vacation response, communicating the plans with the Board of Directors, and establishing clear internal boundaries for the staff (Dance Place). Small changes within an organization add up to the overall support of staff and will help in the ongoing effort to retain and value arts administrators.

Flexibility to work remotely or having hybrid work environments became the norm during the COVID-19 pandemic. As health restrictions and mask mandates were lifted, organizations started to require people to come back to the office for the 9-5 workday even though productivity was not hurt by hybrid work environments (Boland et al.). For some jobs, it is very difficult to offer remote work but it is important to consider the well-being of the employees of the organization and this includes fostering an environment that supports a healthy work-life balance. There is a flexibility bias (O'Connor and Cech) that can hurt an employee's chances of moving up in a company based on their needs as a human (parental leave, sick family member, emergency vet visit, car trouble, pipe burst in home, etc.) and can affect the way they are considered for pay raises and promotions.

In the 2017 New York Times article "*How to Close a Gender Gap: Let Employees Control Their Schedules*," Claire Cain Miller says, "Flexibility regarding time and place that work gets done would go a long way towards closing the gaps." Miller goes on to say that gender wage gaps can be attributed to employers expecting employees to work long hours at a desk and this causes women to be disproportionately judged when they are the primary caregiver in the home and need longer recovery time than maternal leave provides. Hybrid and flexible work environments would be an adjustment for all employees and managers would have to rethink the way they evaluate productivity. When employees feel heard and respected, they are more likely to enjoy their work and be highly productive. Highly productive and motivated individuals are the ones organizations want in leadership positions.

As organizations build their teams, recruiters can humanize the work environment such that recruitment and retention honor the human experience and not just what the organization needs. If the organization is looking to make sure women are included at every level, then

applications will need to be clear about diversity needs in the recruitment process. The fight for salary transparency in job postings is ongoing and with that, statements encouraging those who identify as women to apply go a long way in diversifying recruitment efforts. This may get pushed back by the minutiae of the equal-opportunity employment act but encouraging certain people to apply does not keep others from applying. In a recent job posting for a director-level opportunity, Atlas Performing Arts Center said this after the list of preferred qualifications for applicants, "Not sure you meet 100% of our qualifications? Research shows that men apply for jobs when they meet an average of 60% of the criteria. Yet, women and other people who are systematically marginalized tend to only apply if they meet every requirement. If you believe that you could excel in this role, we encourage you to apply" (Yeuell). By identifying the root of an organization's diversity needs they can better address their efforts in hiring and recruiting processes for interns, staff, volunteers, and the Board of Directors.

Institutional courage means everyone in the organization is working together to make positive changes to better retain, value, and promote the employees who work hard to bring the art to the community. The Board of Directors is a huge player in the overall structure of an organization. As a nonprofit corporation, the organization is working at the will of the Board and hyper focus on the budget and the bottom line is often at the detriment of everything else. The Board is not only responsible for the financial success of the organization but also should do the conscious work to disrupt harmful policies, operations, and behaviors of nonprofit arts organizations. This means doing meaningful work to recruit, train, and continuously talk about how Boards operate. In an interview about dance companies undergoing diversity, equity, inclusion, and access work, Mauro Villanueva, Director of Engagement and Business Development for Cultivating Better Tomorrows, said, "...internal buy-in leads to the change that's

required for the policies to change that then allow for marginalized communities to have more say or contribution to the space in general" (Vostrikov). There are organizations who have identified the need for this work and are doing it successfully to problem-solve and bring the Board and staff together.

Alternate Roots, an organization in Atlanta, GA, had many board and staff challenges until they established a Personnel Committee of the Board. This committee is built of volunteer Board and Staff members and the charge of this committee is to navigate personnel issues, mitigate harm, equalize voice, and the structure forces power dynamics to be diminished. With the successful establishment of this committee, they were able to develop a critical response process that held an open dialogue and made space for tough conversations to happen (Clapp). This structural change provided the organization with opportunities to have safe spaces for conversations that included everyone and also made a direct place for staff to address their concerns. The Board and staff were able to listen and communicate and informed choices were made throughout the organization.

The rhetoric of working ourselves to death for nonprofits and the arts continues to show up for arts administrators. Younger generations are setting boundaries with their work hours and are still fighting the fact that they are grossly underpaid (Francis). Many organizations are struggling to retain staff members and move them up from entry and mid-level jobs and that is where arts organizations start to lose incredible art administrators to the corporate world. By retaining arts-minded people who understand the work, arts organizations can help build a pipeline of successful arts leaders.

Organizational structure goes beyond day-to-day operations and the arts are often spread very thin to make sure the lights stay on in the classrooms, stages, and galleries. Acknowledging

that change is risky and taking those risks for the better treatment of the people making the mission of the organization come to fruition is vital to the retention of excellent arts administrators. It is on the board of directors and executive leadership to invest in internal structure shifts that will serve not only the staff but the organization at large as a staple in the community. Investing in the people goes beyond the paycheck but arts organizations need to look at pay structures as well. Gender pay disparities are still prevalent in the arts and organizations need to commit to the investment in salary raises to retain, value, and promote arts administrators.

Gender Pay Equity

Despite arts administrators being overwhelmingly female, they are paid far less than their male counterparts (Hegewisch et al.). This lack of financial appreciation has serious ramifications for women working in the arts and for the organizations that depend on them. Hiring women at salaries commensurate with their experience in the field and with the men that work for the same company is key to not only valuing but also promoting women working in the arts.

Gender pay equity continues to be a problem for women working in the United States according to the Institute for Women's Policy Research. Gender pay equity also disproportionately affects women of color. Compared to the median weekly earnings of White men working full-time, Hispanic women's full-time earnings were just 58.4%, Black women's 63.1%, and White Women's 79.6% in 2021 (Hegewisch et al.). Women make up a majority of employees in museums and other arts organizations but still face pay inequity based on gender. Women also occupy fewer directorships at museums with budgets over \$15 million, holding 30%

of art museum director positions and earning 75¢ for every dollar earned by male directors (Trevino et al.).

According to a study by the National Endowment for the Arts, a portion of gender pay inequalities have been attributed to the lack of women in executive leadership roles, however, other data shows that women are in leadership roles and still making less than men. A 2019 analysis of wages, benefits, and the arts in the metropolitan areas of Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Columbus, and Indianapolis found that Executive Directors and Chief Executive Officers (ED/CEO) were majority female but salaries for men were higher than those of women in all five cities. 71% of Cleveland's arts and culture nonprofits had female Eds/CEOs but the average salary of a female ED/CEO was 15% lower than the average salary of a man working in the same position. The same survey data found women in Indianapolis made up 75% of the Eds/CEOs and were on average making 61% less than men in the same jobs (Swain et al.).

According to Pacific Northwest Ballet's financial statements and 990s from 2019 and 2020 (United States. Department of Treasury. Internal Revenue Service) Executive Director Ellen Walker made on average 42% less than her male counterpart Peter Boal the Artistic Director. Walker has over 35 years of experience in nonprofit arts management and has served as the Executive Director for PNB for 9 years. Boal had a 22-year career as a professional ballet dancer with New York City Ballet and taught for the School of American Ballet for 8 of those years. He became the Artistic Director of PNB in 2005. Boal's tenure at PNB explains a gap when comparing wages but if Walker had been hired at a salary commensurate with her experience and her colleague's pay scale, the wage gap could be significantly smaller. This is not the case for all arts organizations with dual leadership structures but investigating pay structures throughout the organization will help identify ways to make changes for the benefit of all staff.

The Association of Art Museum Directors conducted a study in 2016 that showed clear disparities in gender representation based on the size of the organization's budget. The majority of museums with budgets less than \$15 million were run by a female director while museums with budgets over \$15 million were more often run by male directors. Still, both large and small museums showed women were paid less than men with extreme gaps at the larger institutions. The study also found that female directors tend to have lower salaries than their male counterparts relative to the museum operating budget (Trevino et al.).

In addition to pay equity, it is necessary to examine the health benefits offered and the costs shouldered by employers and employees when considering the retention of staff. Not all organizations will be required to provide health insurance based on their size but by including this in staff benefits the organizations will be able to show they value their staff and may have longer retention. Uninsured women often have inadequate access to care, get a lower standard of care when they are in the health system, and have poorer health outcomes. Compared to women with insurance, uninsured women have lower use of important preventive services such as mammograms, Pap tests, and timely blood pressure checks ("Women's Health").

According to an analysis of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Expenditure Surveys from 2020, women spent an average of 6.8% of their annual pretax income on health insurance, which was almost double the 3.9% spent by men due to higher costs (Festa). This study also found that single women earning less than \$15,000 annually spent 20.7% of their income on health insurance and men in the same income bracket spent 8.4% of their income. Robin Townsend, a health and life insurance expert, says insurers charge more based on gender due to health risks because of more frequent doctor visits and more complex medical procedures like pregnancy. Though organizations cannot fully financially support employees with the

complex issues of health insurance, by offering comprehensive insurance benefits to staff, organizations show support and investment in the entire individual.

Along with health and leave benefits, nonprofit arts organizations often offer additional time off, free perks within the organization, and other intangible benefits instead of paying the staff equitably. To understand how an organization can improve, it must audit its pay and benefits policies fully. Hiring outside consulting is expensive and deliverables must be clear on both ends and an outside opinion can help identify problems within an organization's structure. Volunteer assistance of the Board of Directors can be helpful by tasking a committee to research and find a consulting firm worth the time and expense needed to do the work that will provide helpful results. There was a nationwide response to the Black Lives Matter movement that caused organizations to bring in outside help to address the racial inequities within their organization and make plans for the future. There was no question of whether it was needed or affordable, leadership made it happen. It is time to do that for gender equity.

To better address pay inequities, organizations have hired outside consultants to conduct a job study. The consulting firm, Orr Group, defines a job study as the process organizations use to understand how they are paying their employees concerning one another or compared to other organizations. The result of a compensation analysis is a formal pay structure organizations use as a guide in hiring or adjusting pay to ensure the organization is being financially responsible in its operations and to its employees. From this study, organizations can take the recommendations to make sure all employees are first making the minimum living wage base salary or hourly minimum wage for the metropolitan area. Important adjustments can be made to bring all employees to not only a livable wage but an equitable one based on outside analysis that also continues to include the annual cost of living and merit increases for all staff.

Pay equity is a necessary and difficult hurdle for nonprofit arts organizations. The average debt in 2021 for people ages 25-40 was \$100,906 and for people ages 41-56 averaged \$146,164 (Horymski). Millennials and Generation X play a large role in the arts administration workforce and they have the highest average debts in the United States. Nonprofit arts organizations must pay employees enough to not only survive but to thrive. Organizations and their leaders need to have the confidence to make decisions that could impact the way they do business. It is time to take the financial risk to pay people equitably and changes to programming volume and funding resources will be needed.

Conclusion

Nonprofit arts organizations need proactive policies and resources to support and protect women and to retain, value, and promote women working in the arts. There are many organizations setting incredible examples of welcoming and nurturing workplaces across the nation. Arts organizations need to have institutional courage to change for their people so women are represented and treated equitably at all levels of employment. Retention of incredible arts administrators through changes to workplace policies and the treatment and pay of women is possible through open communication within the organization, changes to internal organization structure and policies, and gender pay equity. Women are essential to the nonprofit arts world. Safe and welcoming conditions for the workplace must be met in order to retain women in the arts.

Women will feel welcome and have successful careers in arts administration when organizations take conscious steps to open the door for communication and talk about the issues facing their people in and out of the workplace. When organizations are clear in their hiring

processes about goals for welcoming a diverse staff and have salary transparency, they are immediately showing that communication is open and growth within the organizations is active and will continue as each new staff member joins the team. The arts administration field thrives when women are supported to speak up, take up space with their expertise, and be challenged to grow in their careers; the field will have stronger retention of incredible arts leaders. The way arts organizations conduct business will need to be evaluated and several ethical, financial, and practical factors come into consideration but all of the evidence is pointing to the leadership of arts organizations to reach internally and start the important and difficult conversations.

It takes all three facets described in this paper to retain, value, and support women working in the arts: pay equity is an obvious hurdle and it must be supported with institutional support and changes to organizational structures. When a woman joins an organization, she must be hired at a salary commensurate with her colleagues and her experience and supported through onboarding with adequate communication from human resources and leadership on expectations of the position as well as outlets for communicating her needs. Making the arts administration field a safe space for everyone is essential and each person involved is responsible for continuing to break down walls and leave the door open for others to follow and make their efforts to a more equitable field.

Lawmakers of this nation continue to demonstrate that the rights of women are not important and are disposable as bills are continuously proposed to take away liberties and attack freedom of expression. The arts are where humans can dig into the difficult topics and find solutions through artistic expression. Passionate arts administrators are vital to this work. Women bring exciting perspectives and inimitable talent to the field of arts administration. There is no excuse for pay inequity and poor institutional support to stand in the way of a woman's success

in this career field anymore. Women belong in the arts. It is the task of arts administrators to make it happen with meaningful dialogue and structural changes to better invest in women so they are valued and respected as leaders in the arts world.

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