

Call to Action

VISIBLE WOMEN
ARTS & GENDER

October 2021



Murray Edwards
College
University of Cambridge

***“Things change when
we are determined to
make them do so.”***

MARIA BRADSHAW,
DIRECTOR, TATE

If creative talent exists throughout society, why do talented women remain unequally represented in leadership roles, governance and visibility across the Arts - including music, theatre, ballet and literature, as well as the visual arts? For women of colour, women from working class backgrounds, disabled women and LGBTQ+ women, the lack of representation is even more stark.

Against a backdrop of the world's second biggest collection of visual art by women, the *Visible Women - Arts & Gender* conference in September 2021 brought together impactful women and men who are addressing this issue. Their shared experiences, insights and discussion throws light on how to even-up opportunity, visibility and recognition across all sectors of the Arts. The conference

was held at Murray Edwards College, University of Cambridge and was supported by the John Browne Charitable Trust.

This Call to Action is the practical outcome of the conference. It presents specific recommendations to ensure the creative Arts become genuinely more inclusive, and to better reflect, recognise - and inspire - creative talent in our society.

It focuses on four priority issues, and is particularly aimed at those working in roles who can influence change.

For more context on why action is needed, and for examples of good practice to guide change, please read the full conference report: *Visible Women - Arts & Gender* (available at www.murrayedwards.cam.ac.uk from the end of November 2021).

1. VISIBILITY

Why we need action:

Statistics repeatedly show that creative works by women are under-represented across the Arts - in public collections, commercial galleries, music and dance repertoires.

“...despite the great efforts of feminist academics and curators of my generation, we still do not have enough works by women, people of colour and non-binary people in our collections.”

MARIA BALSHAW, DIRECTOR, TATE

Women are the majority of those working in the Arts (57%) but this is not reflected in the most influential roles (e.g. only 35% of the Directors of the Arts institutions in London receiving more than £1 million of Arts Council funding are women).

HOW TO EFFECT CHANGE:

- Review the accepted canon relevant to your sector: is it representative of women's work through the ages?
- Develop a strategic focus on works by women, including women of colour, and non-binary artists.
- Make sure that women have sponsors who support them in their organisation.
- Involve men as allies in bringing about change.

2. INCLUSION

Why we need action:

The high percentage of women working in the Arts masks their lack of representation in senior roles. At all levels, women of colour, disabled women, bisexual women and trans women remain under-represented.

Inclusion means fair representation and support – not just for creative artists, but for people working in all roles in the Arts, from governance to support staff.

Barriers to inclusion include mental health and physical challenges specifically affecting women, including pregnancy, miscarriage and menopause.

HOW TO EFFECT CHANGE:

- Join enlightened organisations which are applying fair access principles (e.g. in the music sector, see [Sound and Music www.soundandmusic.org/our-impact/fair-access-principles](http://www.soundandmusic.org/our-impact/fair-access-principles)).
- Support and practice positive action to broaden inclusion:
 - gather and publish data (including socio-economic background) to show where the issues are
 - set targets
 - hold (your) organisation to account.
- Ask those who say that inclusion/fairer representation will compromise quality to demonstrate what evidence they have to support this.
- Brief recruitment agencies to ensure that candidate shortlists are representative.
- In selection, consider potential rather than just focussing on experience and skills.
- Encourage a workplace culture (policy and practice) where women (and men) feel safe to discuss mental health and any adversity they may be facing. Support them when they do.

3. PAY

Why we need action:

Short term contracts, unpaid positions, low pay and financial precariousness for freelance artists are commonplace in the Arts. This limits who can afford to work in the sector, and is a barrier to inclusion/fair representation.

Across the Arts, women are paid 10% less than men.

HOW TO EFFECT CHANGE:

- Be transparent about pay.
- *“Recognise your values and state your terms”* (Maria Balshaw).
- Mentor young women (especially women of colour) to build confidence and support them (e.g. with funding/awards/opportunities).
- Ensure Arts Council funded organisations pay artists properly and make transparent choices in staff and programming.
- Support - and share - research initiatives that improve transparency in fees to artists, especially in the visual arts where so many are freelance (e.g. www.a-n.co.uk).

4. LEADERSHIP

Why we need action:

Leadership positions are typically defined/framed/advertised to appeal to stereotypical male qualities.

Boards/Governors/Trustees typically seek leaders in their own mould; if they are not representative of wider society, Arts leadership is unlikely to be.

In organisations where career progression depends on self-nomination, women are less likely to reach senior positions.

If all this is to be achieved, we need to acknowledge the importance of engaging children in the Arts, and from a young age. This is a significant challenge for our education system, and while it is an urgent priority, it cannot be a distraction from what people working in the Arts can be doing NOW to make a positive difference.

HOW TO EFFECT CHANGE:

- Champion/commission more inclusive talent, and then support the needs of those you bring on board.
- Learn from other leaders and organisations that are more progressive. Enlightened leaders of small organisations can have an impact.
- Work towards more vigilance and systematic methods to embed inclusive principles in all decision-making at all levels.
- Seek allies (men, women and non-binary) and collectively build networks for change (internally and externally).
- Call for/insist on gender-balanced (more inclusive) boards for Arts organisations (e.g. through pressure from the National Museum Directors' Council).
- Flatten pyramid hierarchies/work towards more collaborative leadership.
- Encourage (young) women to mentor senior figures in your organisation (to increase awareness/sensitivities).
- Relinquish power!



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