

Detailed Report

VISIBLE WOMEN ARTS & GENDER

March 2022



Murray Edwards
College
University of Cambridge

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INTRODUCTION

Dame Barbara Stocking
President, Murray Edwards College 2013-2021

The Art Collection at Murray Edwards College is the second largest collection of women's modern and contemporary art in the world. It is displayed across all of the College, both in public and private areas. We live and work with it. Unsurprisingly then we are also concerned about the place of women in the art world: the low percentage of works by women shown in public or private galleries; the disparity of price with women receiving less than men; and until recently very few women leaders.

Similar concerns have been raised across all the arts and the **Visible Women** conference was designed to compare and learn from each other and to develop a "call to action" across the arts. Representatives were present from theatre, film, music, dance and publishing. We also wanted to learn more from women who experience double discrimination, for example, as women of colour or women who self-identify as LGBTQ+.

There is much to be done to recognise all women in the arts and it was clear from the conference that achieving real inclusion is

a long way off. Perhaps most interesting was the difference in view across ages. Younger women – graduates, students, young professionals – were harsher in their judgement about how little had been achieved. They were also more ready to acknowledge the additional physiological differences of women, which ought to be taken into account in their work: not just pregnancy, but periods and the menopause.

There was enormous energy throughout the conference with so many prepared to call for real and lasting change and not to slip back into the description given by Adele Patrick: "We seem to suffer a wilful form of amnesia perpetually rediscovering figures who should be there in the foreground of cultural memory".

Please reflect on the call to action and decide how you can make a difference.

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

MARIA BALSHAW, CBE
DIRECTOR, TATE



CREATING FAIRNESS

“The ability to be comfortable in uncertainty; the ability to hold the confidence of others when you have no idea.” These qualities helped Maria Balshaw to guide Tate through the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, and led her to explore further the nature of leadership that best embraces equality and inclusion.

“Holding to a set course, clarity and objectivity have all been useless in the past 18 months,” she says. “Kindness, flexibility and humility have all been invaluable”.

In a keynote speech to launch the conference, Balshaw drew from personal history and observations of the art world throughout her career to discuss the challenges of creating a fairer world for women working in the arts, and her vision for change.

Discovering who I am and where I want to be

Maria Balshaw says she is surprised to be Director of Tate: “I have no background in art,” she admits. She is equally candid about being hard working and high achieving. Balshaw grew up in a Midlands new town, where, alongside school and family life, she was a rhythmic gymnast, training in the national squad for five years. It was addictive and exciting, but also lonely and painful.

“What I now know I learned was a discipline of mind and body and emotions, and a kind of focus, and also the importance of practice and repetition if we are going to succeed at what we’re going to do. I know that has helped me in the very different world I live in now.”

Through gymnastics, she also experienced “the kind of ‘I’ll-bloody-show-you energy” when others thought she couldn’t do something. “One of my biggest motivations to succeed has been other people telling me that I wouldn’t, and my determination to prove them wrong.”

Balshaw studied English Literature and Cultural Studies at the University of Liverpool, coming away with a first class degree, and the advice, which she followed, to pursue her passions and her politics. She did an MA in Critical Theory at the University of Sussex, followed by a PhD in African American Visual and Literary Culture. At Sussex, she says, “I discovered both who I was and a place where I wanted to be.”

Balshaw became an academic, working in London, Northampton and then Birmingham. Her two children were born during this time, and she and a fellow junior academic friend found themselves as the first members of their department to have given birth to children during the time they were in the department.”

Lessons in ruthless efficiency

“We were a gang of two women with four children” says Balshaw, adding: “I share this because in spite of all that does still need to change, there has been huge positive improvement for working women. But also because learning to juggle a baby, my career, my life and friendships was the most valuable and formative experience I have had. As a not-very-well-off parent, I learnt to do things with ruthless efficiency.”

It is one of the key messages that Balshaw wants to make, and which shapes her leadership ideas: “I’m not suggesting having children is the solution to everything, but I did want to be on the record, countering some of the untruths that hold women of all backgrounds and identities back, still.

“Even in my own organisation, I still encounter women who hear from others that they can’t have a family and a big leadership role in a museum or the wider arts. This is in spite of the fact that at Tate, the three most senior women, myself included, have eight children and two stepchildren between us, and we have always worked.

“In our sector, and in wider society, our post-pandemic thinking about the future of work, only underlines how we all need the freedom to make the widest variety of life and work choices.

“We need modes of working that really support the widest pool of talent in our organisations. It’s not only about parenting. I think leaders now need to be considering what more diverse and different organisational structures might look like that are needed for the complex multivalent times that we find ourselves in.”

New direction

Balshaw was working her way up the academic ladder when she realised she was more interested in motivating and encouraging others, and needed a new direction. A friend showed her a job advert for a Director of the new active research programme, Creative Partnerships – established in 2002 as part of a wider government social policy.

She hesitated, then applied – although without much hope: “My main qualification for the role was my research background, but never having worked in the arts it is fair to say that I was a fairly unlikely candidate.” She got the job, and her success illustrates another tendency that she wants to see change:

“I still see that it is too prevalent amongst women that we talk ourselves out of jobs even before we apply, and that needs to stop.”

Balshaw looks back on her time with Creative Partnerships as one of the most difficult and intense jobs she’s ever done. There was a budget of £2 million to spend in a year, on artist-led activities with schools in really tough circumstances. None of the 16 directors of the programme had ever done anything like it before, and Balshaw herself was entering a whole new sector.

“I realise now that much of the resilience, creativity, bloody mindedness, empathy and passion that I need in my current role was forged then,” she says.

It was also the time when she learnt the importance of support. “I came to understand that for me, it matters hugely that the work I do makes a difference in the world, and I realised – through the very difficulty of doing that role – that I needed help, and I learnt to ask for it.”

A woman arts leader in Birmingham, who had interviewed her for the job, offered to be a mentor. Another friend encouraged her to get a coach. Both helped Balshaw to build what she calls “an alliance of fellow travellers in the arts.”

The need for support is always there. “However successful and experienced, or senior, any of us are, the need for this, in my view, never goes away,” she says.

“It’s powerful to ask for help and to recognise the things that you can’t do alone and that other people can do better than you, be they friends or members of your teams or colleagues. They then have a genuine role in achieving a goal. It also helps with building the networks and friendships, and these will help more – more than anything – in achieving what needs to be done.”

Leadership instinct

The next key opportunity was when Balshaw was selected to be an inaugural fellow for the **Clore Leadership Programme** – a scheme founded in 2002 to provide professional training and personal development for British professionals in the cultural sector.

The experience gave Balshaw “the structure of support for my leadership instinct” and “a core peer group of very different kinds of arts leaders”. Coming from a wide range of institutions and sectors, Balshaw describes her Clore peers as “powerful drivers of change in our sector, who are modelling different leadership modes”.

Clore paved the way to Balshaw being headhunted to become Director of the University of Manchester’s Whitworth Gallery. It was an exciting time in a city that was ambitious about culture, and the benefits it can bring people.

“I got to test a lot of ideas, without the spotlight pressure of being in London at a national institution. That’s important; we often need a space to test and fail before we’re ready to test and succeed.”

During 12 years in Manchester, Balshaw’s role expanded, providing experience in leading a major capital project at the Whitworth, adding the Directorship of Manchester Art Gallery and then also leading culture for the city. It was an impressive portfolio, and one which meant that Balshaw was a serious candidate when Tate needed a new Director to succeed Nick Serota in 2017.

She might not have thrown her hat into the ring, however, had it not been for a conversation with “the inspirational” Alex Poots, who set up and then led the Manchester International Festival. Somewhat overawed when asked to lead culture in the city, as well as running two galleries, Balshaw remembers Poots asking her:

“Do you want to do what the role needs? If so, know your own value, name your conditions and believe in yourself.”

While the answer to the first question was a clear ‘Yes’, Balshaw found the second part of his advice harder. “He had absolutely no problem about naming his terms and recognising his own value. My words failed me when I tried to do that. It’s one of the things still holding women back and one of the things we can support each other on, as men and women, to change.”

51% of visual art practitioners are women but only 35% of the artists represented by commercial galleries in London are women.

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF
WOMEN IN THE ARTS

Speaking honestly and openly

Seen through a Tate lens of 2020/21, Balshaw concludes that the representation of women in the visual arts looks good. She is proud to be Director of Tate at a time when it is no longer the exception that women artists can be the mainstay of the programme for a national gallery or museum.

Exhibitions by women artists like Yayoi Kusama and Paula Rego are sold out. These are women who have re-shaped the artistic and cultural canon, and who are also household names, and commercially successful.

“We should not be surprised about this,” says Balshaw. “Women are 50% of the population, have long dominated the art schools, art history courses, gallery and museum workforces, but it has taken a very long time to get to this.”

Balshaw remembers first working with Marina Abramovich in 2009 in Manchester. “She didn’t have gallery representation; her work was not even in Tate’s collection, and this despite the impact of her performance work in the 1970s and 1980s.

In planning the 18 day-long exhibition at Whitworth, Balshaw and her team imagined it would be a niche show for those into strange performance art and feminism. In fact, it sold out for every day of the exhibition, even though visitors had to stay for four hours. Balshaw concluded: “The public, it seemed, was



Dame Paul Rego
Inês de Castro

ahead of us in terms of thinking and embracing a different vision of what mattered in the visual arts.”

The representation of women working at Tate is also in a good place: 65% of staff at all levels are female, and 80% of the senior team are women. “This is cause for celebration,” says Balshaw, “but I am regularly criticised for having too many women.”

Hardly fair, she thinks, when she is the first woman to have led Tate, and particularly considering that only two of the 12 London-based national museums are currently led by women (four of which have never had a woman director).

Driving change

The representation of women at Tate, however, is not reflective of the wider arts sector – especially with respect to money and leadership. Of the London-based arts institutions receiving more than £1m Arts Council funding, only 35% of directors are women. This compares with institutions getting less than £1m, where 63% of directors are women.

Men working in the arts are still paid 10% more than women.

“I don’t know why,” says Balshaw. “I’m proud to say there’s no gender pay gap at Tate.”

The balance of exhibitions across London and across the UK falls into this 65% men and 35% women split. “There is some progress, some visibility, but not enough,” says Balshaw.

The good news is that the ongoing imbalance is driving change. “Tate, the Art Council Collection, the Government Art Collection and many museums around the UK are now making sustained efforts to ensure that the gender, race, ethnicity and sexuality of artists acquired do reflect the society we live in now.”

These efforts are creating some exciting new statistics: 93% of the 42 works acquired by the Government Art Collection in 2018/19 are works by women.

At Tate, change is being driven by the current strategic focus of works by artists of colour, non-binary and women artists. Balshaw is clear why this is important:

“Despite the great efforts of feminist academics and curators of my generation, and those before us, we still do not have enough works by women, people of colour and non-binary people in our historically white and male collections.”

Balshaw says that Tate is criticised by some for taking this action, and criticised by others for not doing enough fast

enough. “I have a lot more sympathy for the second view”, she says. “We have got to keep this focus across the more than 500 years of art that we care for because things change when we are determined to make them do so.”

This is borne out by British artists represented at the Venice Biennale: in the past decade, 50% have been women, compared to the previous 65% male/35% female split.

Between 2009 and 2019, 67% of The Turner Prize winners were women. Lubaina Himid, the first woman of colour (and the oldest artist) to win the prize, had a solo exhibition at Tate Modern in autumn 2021.

All this, Balshaw sees as “just a start” towards greater representation. She wants to bring in more diverse voices, more challenging and innovative work by women, artists neglected by history, and works by non-European women.

The working environment

Alongside efforts to broaden the representation of artists themselves, there are visible changes in workplace experience.

Tate provides maternity, paternity, carers, adoption and compassionate leave; there are breast feeding and expressing

rooms; and a parent and carers network. This network recently invited Candice Braithwaite, author of ‘Making Motherhood Diverse’, to explore what more is needed to challenge stereotypes and to flex working arrangements. The aim, says Balshaw, was “to support all parents better, so that we get the best for everyone as well as encourage people to thrive... so that talent is nurtured across the organisation.”

There is much to celebrate, but still much more to do. Balshaw believes in speaking out against the everyday sexism and misogyny that she continues to encounter in spite of her considerable clout.

Spectacular examples include Balshaw being introduced to someone as the Director of Tate with her husband beside her and the person turning to shake his hand. There are the “vexacious conversations” with men in the art world about ‘Me Too’ allegations being exaggerated. And then there are commentaries by journalists who talk about her colourful clothes, her children, her yoga... “Many of my male colleagues buy gorgeous shoes, have expensive suits and – surprise, surprise – have begat children. You will look long and hard before you hear any mention of that.”

“It will not be more equal until we speak honestly and openly about the challenges we still face. If I still find it difficult to do this, I can see why we all do – but it is necessary.”

Encouraging kindness

Balshaw also thinks it is important to talk about other issues that impede change. From miscarriage to menopause, and caring for ageing relatives, women are more impacted by a range of regular – often heart-breaking – life experiences which need facing up to as they work, study and take on leadership roles.

How should leadership respond? Encouraging kindness and empathy in workplaces is an aspect of leadership that Balshaw believes to be “massively powerful, much better than being ruthless.”

In our ever more connected world, where collaboration across disciplines is increasingly needed, it helps when people want to work with you. “Being nice doesn’t mean that you can’t also be direct, ambitious, tough and high achieving,” says Balshaw. Advocating a culture of empathy would help the arts to be genuinely inclusive, and be part of promoting the things that we need for a good society.

These views have shaped Balshaw’s vision for Tate: to be artistically adventurous in response to what artists and audiences want and need; and to be socially and ethically responsible in striving for relevance and connectedness with the widest range of communities – including those who see Tate from around the world through the digital realm.

Empathetic leadership has never been tougher than during the COVID-19 pandemic, but through it, Balshaw says she has seen more and better examples of a humane approach to work. “That’s sorely needed if we are to face the real challenges of our age – such as the climate emergency – and how we use our cultural voice and our artistic clout to make change happen faster.”

“What we must support in terms of leadership is collective problem solving, generosity of knowledge sharing and commitment to long-term goals. This means growing our collective tolerance of uncertainty and building our resources for long term tenacity.”

Balshaw concludes with a pithy shortlist of what makes a difference to women’s place in the arts:

- “The building of networks of support; the people who come along with you. I’ve taken my biggest risks when I was holding someone else’s hand.”
- “Failure has to be practiced so that risks can be taken. Risk-taking has to be encouraged alongside risk assessment, and we need some things to go wrong so we can understand better what ‘right’ might look like.”
- “Acts of collective determination undertaken with kindness, joy, humour and a bit of ‘arsy’ defiance are what we all need to make the arts a place where we can all thrive.”

***“Everything has to
change at the top”***

JOANNA MACGREGOR, CBE
HEAD OF PIANO, ROYAL ACADEMY OF MUSIC



CHAIR:
PROFESSOR
JOANNA
MACGREGOR



NANA AYEGBIA
CLARKE



SUSANNA
EASTBURN



RACHEL
HOLMES

PANEL DISCUSSION: THE UNEVEN FIELD

Are men and women judged differently?
How does that impact on their reputation
and their access to resources?

Perceptions have changed more than reality

In levelling the 'uneven field' for women in the arts, there is progress to celebrate, and much still to do. The panelists' experiences focused on publishing, music and writing. However, many of the issues raised had common threads with other sectors of the arts, and indeed with wider society.

Throughout the arts, perceptions of the representation of women's work, and the opportunities for women at work, are not always aligned with statistics - where statistics exist. Although more women than men study and work in the arts, women artists' work is under-represented in collections, galleries, performances and sales. Women are also under-represented in positions of leadership and governance in the arts.

Most issues discussed during this session were seen as significant in all sectors of the arts. However, there was a range of views about how best to address the challenges - e.g. specific physical differences that affect women's confidence, such as periods, maternity leave, parenting and menopause.

Discussions which have focused on gender imbalance in the arts are evolving into a wider debate about inclusion. While the focus of this conference was on women in the arts, there were regular reminders from speakers, and the audience, that where opportunities for white women are improving, the same cannot be said for women of colour, nor for non-binary people or disabled people. Socio-economic background is also a barrier to opportunities.

In working towards a more even field, agents of change need to encompass all those whose access to the arts is impeded.

In the UK, 64% of undergraduates and 65% of postgraduates in creative arts and design are women, but 68% of the artists represented at top London commercial galleries are men.

FREELANDS FOUNDATION

KEY ISSUES:

- The importance of data
- Confidence/mental health
- More uneven for women of colour
- The importance of allies, mentors and support
- Challenging resistance
- Making change happen

The importance of data

Data is an important agent in change. Statistics help organisations to see priorities for action, to develop policies, set targets and measure progress.

In the music sector, Susanna Eastburn highlighted research published in July 2021 which surveyed the musical works played during the 2020-21 season in concerts performed by 100 of the world's top orchestras, across 27 countries. Only 11.45% of 4,857 scheduled performances included works by women. Of the total number of 14,747 scheduled pieces, only 5% were written by women - and only 1.1% by women composers of colour.

Read the [Equality and Diversity in Concert Halls](#) report.

“After looking at data, we know there’s a problem.”

SUSANNA EASTBURN, CEO, SOUND AND MUSIC

Another recent study looking at work commissioned and performed by the BBC Proms from 2013-2018 showed the average length of works by women was shorter and smaller in scale than those of male counterparts. Of the Proms' own commissions – i.e. world premieres, that were entirely in their control – the average length was 11 minutes for women and 19 minutes for men.

(The BBC Proms is committed to a 50/50 gender balance for performances by contemporary composers by 2022 in line with targets set by the Keychange initiative: www.keychange.eu)

In publishing, the gender balance looks good – at all levels. The UK industry's representative body, the Publishing Association, has been gathering and publishing statistics on diversity in the sector since 2017, when it announced targets to be more inclusive by 2022.

“Size isn't everything, but there's something about the amount of space that we're able to take up.”

SUSANNA EASTBURN, CEO, SOUND AND MUSIC

The latest annual survey shows the sector continuing to meet the target to employ at least 50% women in senior roles. However, there is less progress towards the other target of increasing the ethnic diversity of employees. For Nana Ayebia Clarke, Founder of Ayebia Clarke Publishing Ltd, it's a mixed message:

“The majority of those working in publishing in the UK are women, and not only in junior roles but also in executive leadership roles and in senior management,” she says. “This is brilliant! This is proof that women form the backbone of the publishing industry, but the same cannot be said for women of colour. I want to challenge us today about what we can do to redress this historical imbalance.”

Confidence and mental health

A lack of confidence that many women feel was a recurrent theme in discussion. Some participants said low confidence was linked to “imposter syndrome”; for others, it was entwined with mental health. There was broad consensus that women's confidence is a complex issue, linked to wider questions of gender and identity in society. However, there was also support for the idea that arts organisations, through good leadership, can help to build confidence in women – and men – through workplace initiatives and policies that translate into support networks, mentors, and space to speak out.

There were mixed views about the role of HR departments – where they exist. Some felt that HR responsibilities should include all aspects of artist/employee mental health and wellbeing. Others were concerned that talking openly about mental health would be seen as a weakness or failure. For freelancers, the situation is even more challenging:

“Confidence is something we should cultivate in women,” says Ayebia Clarke. “We need that extra mentoring and support. I can completely identify with the mental angst that women of colour say they experience.

I would have probably been in some awful place if I didn’t have a husband who was so understanding, and a family that absolutely supported me. I also had someone who opened a door for me [to my career] and who was also there to support me at work. That for me was a very important aspect of what we are here talking about.

“The confidence thing doesn’t go away as you get older; it changes.”

SUSANNA EASTBURN, CEO, SOUND AND MUSIC

I sometimes didn’t feel I could go to the HR department to ask for help because asking for help can be seen as a sign of weakness.”

Joanna MacGregor thinks it is people, rather than institutions, who are likely to be more effective in offering the specific support that a person needs to flourish: “In leadership positions, we have a role to play. We have commissioned composers and it’s up to us to make sure we know what they need from us to succeed, and to make (their time with us) a happy, productive and safe experience for them. Composers need different things; it just depends who they are. It’s our responsibility.”

In larger arts organisations, HR departments can put in place support mechanisms to help develop confidence, but Susanna Eastburn says, “We need someone at the top to make it happen – as Maria Balshaw did. Saying this is important: there is a toxic culture in our society of saying that everything is OK, and particularly in the culture industries.”

The issue is more complex if you are a freelancer. As Eastburn says: “We have to address this issue from all angles.”

The extent to which the physical differences of being female – including periods, pregnancy, childbirth and breast-feeding – can affect confidence and mental health are being taken more seriously. Recent studies in this under-researched area reveal that menopause can lead to a huge dip in confidence.

Some women may prefer to talk about these issues, while others will prefer not to. One factor is that women might worry about being judged if they do.

A recurrent idea for addressing confidence was ‘creating space’. Joanna MacGregor urged people not to forget men when addressing lack of confidence: “Please can we include men, because this is not just about women. We need to talk more about this and not just see physical differences.”

“Wherever you can, challenge the accepted culture in the arts that you cannot articulate anything like mental health. It’s profoundly unhelpful.”

SUSANNA EASTBURN, CEO, SOUND AND MUSIC

Women of colour

“Why are we not seeing more faces like mine in the publishing industry?” asks Nana Ayebia Clarke, before adding: “But publishing is not alone in this respect. The arts in general need to do more work to make sure that we have a certain balance in terms of representing the whole of our society.”

Ayebia Clarke explains why this matters in publishing: “The people, editors, publishers, type setters, designers who make the decisions, all of them are an important part of what goes into making a book and if we don’t have representation from ethnic minorities - on this board, in that workforce - it means that their histories, their stories are being overlooked.

The Arts Council and also the British Council have been making interventions about diversity and trying to open doors for people of colour, but this has been going on for all the 30 years that I’ve been working in publishing and I’m still not seeing faces like mine represented in publishing.”

Read the [diversity survey of the publishing workforce](#) report.

Challenging resistance

Those who are striving to make the arts more equal are often met with resistance from people claiming that broader representation will lead to less quality. It's a perception that was vigorously challenged at the conference as misguided and without substance.

"The issue of quality is such a diversion," says Joanna MacGregor, "because it's more to do with access and opportunity for people. The world is full of talent that can't get through the door."

Susanna Eastburn agrees: "When you start to talk about making things more equal, suddenly there's a question mark about the quality of the work you're talking about. I have never compromised on artistic quality.

"The idea that there's a list of composers out there and there's the best one, the second best, third best and so on, is nonsense. There are many, many more talented people out there than we are capable of supporting - but this quality thing comes back, and back again.

I've lost count of number of times people (and I've been working in this field for decades now) come and say to me: 'I'm doing a programme and - you'll like this - it's got a female composer in it.' As if I'm supposed to give a gold star for feminism! As if it's wrong or different or peculiar [for women] to be doing this work. I think part of this is [because] in music - and especially in classical music - there are very embedded notions of what greatness looks like and sounds like - and what the people who create it look and sound like as well.

I feel it's my life's work to be chipping away at this, and also at an established canon: that of the works that we hear, the reason there aren't more works by women is because they didn't make the final cut. There are many reasons why works get neglected: quality is just one of about six reasons why works get taken forward or not."

Activism and culture wars

Author Rachel Holmes, whose latest book discusses the life of Sylvia Pankhurst, drew comparisons between the creative tactics of the suffragettes with today's activist movements – such as Extinction Rebellion (XR) and Black Lives Matter. The way in which these struggles are interpreted and shared with new generations stimulates culture. Yet, in doing so, the vested interests in preserving prevailing cultures are challenged.

Researching Pankhurst and her times, Holmes says we shouldn't forget just how much things have moved on since the suffragettes' battle for change. "And yet, at the same time, we really should be further along," she adds.

So what interventions will make a difference? Holmes agrees that for women working in the arts, access to key roles – such as festival directors and curators – is important, "because then you set the agenda".

“There’s a reason why there are culture wars, because as long as you hang on to the narrative of culture, as long as you are saying what culture is and who owns it, that’s where power is.”

RACHEL HOLMES, AUTHOR AND ACTIVIST

***“In leadership positions,
we have a role to play.”***

JOANNA MACGREGOR, CBE
HEAD OF PIANO, ROYAL ACADEMY OF MUSIC

Making change happen

“There’s a tradition amongst women of being interpreters of others’ music. That’s all fine, but it’s even better to take on authority, which sometimes lies in other roles as well,” says MacGregor.

“I say to [my students]: ‘I expect you to play the piano brilliantly but what I want you to do is change the world’, and try to help them to learn to be artistic leaders. So I have a secret mission to turn them into conductors, composers and festival directors... I think that way you change the game.”

“We are very transparent about our data with respect to diversity and equality. We publish it, we set targets, we hold ourselves to account.”

SUSANNA EASTBURN, CEO, SOUND AND MUSIC

Since Sound and Music started collecting data, they have seen the percentage of women they work with across their programmes increase from about 30% to 52%.

“We really work hard to make sure that happens. It’s just not acceptable to us not to be representative in the composers we work with,” says Eastburn.

“We’ve done a lot of campaigning and talked about this publicly. Lastly, we started looking at barriers that people face – that women face – and as soon as you look at barriers you realise they are compounded if you are a composer of colour; if you are disabled; or according to your background.”

Sound and Music has worked with composers and partners in the industry to create a set of guidelines for running accessible and fair recruitment processes.

Read the [Sound and Music Fair Access](#) report.

Twenty two organisations in the music sector have so far signed up to them. The guidelines recommend no fees, no age limits, and clarity about the criteria for decision-making, and who is involved. Perhaps the most controversial recommendation is that there should be no anonymous selection, but Eastburn is convinced that it is the right thing to do:

“People get angry and say that’s so unfair. But there’s a whole body of research which says that is not the case: if you really want to shift the background of the people you’re working with, you have to know who you’re talking to and to know about the access they have had previously and the potential they have in the future.”

There is still deep frustration – not just limited to the arts – that in spite of widespread talk about increasing diversity, when it comes to hiring there are all sorts of excuses as to why it doesn’t happen, including the response, ‘we don’t see colour’.

“When people say they don’t see colour, I see red mist,” says Ayebia Clarke. She appealed to leaders in the room: “We need you to intervene.” The challenge, she argues, is embedded in centuries old patriarchal systems. Nobody is saying that the archetypal figures in power are bad, she says: “It’s just that they’ve been schooled and socialised in a system that is made for them, and those of us who are not part of that system, we constantly fall outside that system and we are knocking on the doors, but nobody hears our knock.”



Rose Garrard

Madonna Cascade from the *Models Triptych* series

“We seem to be caught in a cycle of recovering hidden histories of women and then losing them again.”

ADELE PATRICK



CHAIR:
GILL HEDLEY



DR KATE
MCMILLAN



PROFESSOR
GRISELDA
POLLOCK



BOLANLE
TAJUDEEN

PANEL DISCUSSION: INVISIBLE WOMEN IN VISUAL ARTS

Are we making progress on the representation of women artists across public and commercial sectors? Are all forms of diversities improving?

Barriers persist

It is 50 years since American feminist Art Historian, Linda Nochlin wrote her pioneering article “Why have there been no Great Women Artists?” (Published in *ARTnews* in January 1971). Nochlin’s article (re)ignited a debate that continues, and one that is relevant – beyond the arts – to the status and visibility of women throughout society.

During this panel discussion (and throughout the conference), the experiences shared illustrate that in spite of the progress made, barriers to fairer representation for women artists persist. The impression of progress is exaggerated by the success of a limited number of ‘star’ women – in exhibition spaces and the commercial market – masking the underlying inequalities which remain.

For women of colour, working class women, non-binary people and disabled women working in the visual arts, the barriers which impede fair representation and visibility are even greater. The importance of statistics was highlighted as a crucial agent for change, and the growing body of evidence means that progress – and the pace of change – is more visible.

Compounding the lack of representation of works by women in collections and galleries is the historic focus on paintings. The diversity of visual art by women, including textile and costume, needs wider appreciation. On a positive note, one clear message to emerge from the conference is that the creativity and quality of women’s work is not reduced by lack of visibility.

“I feel we are grappling with a wilful form of amnesia that requires us to be perpetually rediscovering and reinstating figures who should be in the foreground of cultural memory and not always in jeopardy of being forgotten.”

ADELE PATRICK

KEY ISSUES:

- Amnesia and invisibility
- The delusion of progress
- Monitoring change
- Seeing colour

Amnesia and invisibility

“I’ve noted this with a figure like Maud Sulter, a brilliant Black Scottish artist who made a huge and powerful body of work, who always seems to be on the point of inclusion into the canon but slips out of focus only to be recovered again by another wave of feminist activists, curators and researchers.

This amnesia doesn’t just happen with women artists; it also happens with institutions that focus on fairer representation.”

Example: Glasgow Women’s Library

In 2018 the Glasgow Women’s Library co-founded by Adele Patrick, was shortlisted for the prestigious Art Fund Museum of the Year award: a newsworthy event, as not just the first equalities-focussed museum to be shortlisted but the first Scottish museum. A year later, the V&A Dundee was shortlisted, and the press - including Scottish Government Press Office - noted the “fact” that the V&A Dundee was the first Scottish museum to be nominated.

“How could our shortlisting - only one year before - have been erased?” asks Adele Patrick. The GWL even had Glasgow in its name, and Nicola Sturgeon had done a video clip in support of the GWL nomination the year before.

More information: [Glasgow Women’s Library](#) and [Women’s Art Library \(at Goldsmiths, University of London\)](#):

Don't forget archives

The value of archives was underlined by Gill Hedley, who urged young researchers to investigate further and help to elevate the names and works of talented women whose works have not been fairly recognised.

“Libraries and archives dedicated to women are immensely important resources. We are seeking the energies of a much younger generation. The archives are where the visibilities lie, if only you open them up.”

The delusion of progress

Since winning the 2020 Holberg Prize, Griselda Pollock, has been constantly asked about rediscovering forgotten women artists and asked if progress has been made.

Her response is “not much” – even though it is 50 years after American Art Historian, Linda Nochlin, famously asked: why are there no great women artists? The core of the problem is that the entire system by which our society teaches about, assesses and values art is stacked in favour of the white male artist.



Maud Sulter

Phalia from the *Zabat* series

This work, produced in 1989, celebrates creative Black women. It is recognised that Alice Walker is now considered a controversial figure.

“The issues are not just knowing a few more women’s names. (Women are) selectively shown in blockbuster exhibitions, in utterly conventional monographic shows, without any social history, any theoretical framing, and usually trivialised or sentimentalised biographical explanations,” says Pollock.

“What has not been taken on board is the meaning of feminist analysis, of social systems, the complexity of cultural forms; the process of producing meaning aesthetically or semiotically.”

GRISELDA POLLOCK

Mere minor adjustments

Pollock argues that post-68 feminist dreams of alliances against capitalist colonial patriarchy have been sidelined by “some minor adjustments to allow women to become a more major part of the workforce: of course, with lower pay, with double responsibilities for their private and personal lives – and they have to juggle their work so that they never really want to be the CEO at the top of the tree which is left to the men’s club; the white men’s club.”

She acknowledges that feminists could have done more to support women artists of colour, queer artists, and disabled artists, but says that most of the blame lies with the cultural institutions. In particular, she points the finger at the “real power brokers – the art market. Since the 2007 crash, art is a profoundly financialised investment industry.”

“A collection such as that at Murray Edwards is more than a body of work by artists who are women. It becomes a space, articulating what each artist has explored, created and offered to the world: to a world that systematically does not value what women experience, what they think, what they feel, what they create, what they imagine, and does not understand what they endure. Without symbolic value, we have no financial value, and without financial value, in this world we live in, we acquire no symbolic value.”

***“If they don’t give you
a seat at the table,
bring your own stool.”***

CLAUDIA JONES (1915 – 1964)
JOURNALIST AND ACTIVIST

Monitoring change

Dr Kate McMillan was a successful artist, curator and academic in Australia when she came to London in her late 30s with a body of fully-funded work, intending to launch her international career. Her plans crashed when she was told that without a commercial gallery backing her in the UK, nobody would take on her work. “It was a complete shock. I was so naive,” she says. As her hopes of working on big projects in public institutions shrank, her anger grew.

Around the same time (2016), there was a media outburst around the publicity for an inaugural exhibition at Lisson Gallery’s new space in New York, featuring work by Carmen Herrera. A photo from the opening showed Herrera as the only woman surrounded by a crowd of Lisson’s male artists. The NYT Art Critic, Jerry Salz, posted a dig at the gallery’s gender imbalance, then quickly withdrew it, saying that he felt he’d been unfair to Lisson.

This prompted McMillan to start counting the number of women represented by galleries – first at Lisson (11%) and then at galleries across London. “I got slightly obsessed with counting every gallery in London – about 110 at the time. Only about 20% of the galleries represented 50% or more women. All the really big ones represented hardly any female artists at all.”

Statistics stick

McMillan’s interest in these numbers grew, and when the Freelands Foundation needed an author for their annual report – Representation of Female Artists in Britain – she took it on.

In the UK, 65-70% of graduates going to art school are women. And yet, says McMillan, fast forward 10-15 years and the representation of women artists in commercial galleries completely reverses. At the current rate of improvement of about 1% a year, McMillan says gender parity will take another 100 years.

“What’s different about the visual arts compared with other art forms is that we are talking about an asset class, and that’s really clear. The commercial galleries are giving money to institutions to show ‘their’ artists. They are selecting artists on

“Statistics stick in people’s heads. It’s not anecdotal anymore; it’s real.”

KATE MCMILLAN

the basis of who their collectors are likely to buy. We're talking about institutions, like Tate, which have historic, valuable collections of important male artists, who arguably don't want to devalue those works, so change is incredibly slow, based on relationships with the art market. This is one of the big challenges."

With the knowledge that comes from statistics, McMillan wants to explore what best practice looks like, and how to mitigate the effects of motherhood, race and class, where these factors reduce representation.

“In this year’s report we have some statistics on socio-economic background and ethnicity which will help to flesh out intersectional layers of those obstacles.”

KATE MCMILLAN

Seeing colour

Bolanle Tajudeen founded **Black Blossoms** in 2015 to support and highlight Black women artists through a public programme that includes exhibitions, panels and screenings throughout the UK. In 2020, Black Blossoms School of Art & Culture was established. Its aim is to expand critical and diverse thought that will decolonise and disrupt euro-centric art and creative education.

Tajudeen was a politically active student of PR at the University of the Arts London (UAL), when she experienced “an enormous spiritual awakening to the arts and the power it can have on one’s life.” Through student activism and campaigns, she was increasingly aware of injustices and inequalities in the education system that she was travelling through, and in the wider world of art that she was discovering.

One glaring fact was the lack of Black lecturers, and the attainment gap for PoC (people of colour) students. “For me there was a direct correlation between the amount of Black and PoC lecturers there were and the low grades of Black and PoC students compared with their white counterparts,” she says.

A lot of thinking

Alongside her dissertation and raising a child, Tajudeen did a lot of thinking. “Blossoms grew out of wanting to create an environment that was safe for me and my friends to come and discuss issues that were affecting us in life, in society, in university.”

Her move into curation came with the chance to do an exhibition in the High Holborn London College of Fashion space with Black women and Black non-binary students. “It was really successful. I loved curation, and at the same time I knew something was amiss because in order to understand the industry I was going into, I needed to know the history, and that is when I started to see the collective amnesia.”

Citing Lubaina Himid, Sonia Boyce, Frank Bolyn and Steve McQueen, Tajudeen points out that for many Black and BAME artists, the colleges and universities they went to “failed to platform them, and highlight their achievements, even as part of their alumni.”

She is similarly unimpressed that it took so long to award the Turner Prize to a Black woman (Lubaina Himid in 2017). While Rachel Whiteread was the first woman to win the prize in 1997, and Chris O’Philly was the first Black artist to win it in 1998, Tajudeen points out: “It took another 20 years for a Black woman to win it, so we have to look at the intersection where Black women are placed.”



Lubaina Himid

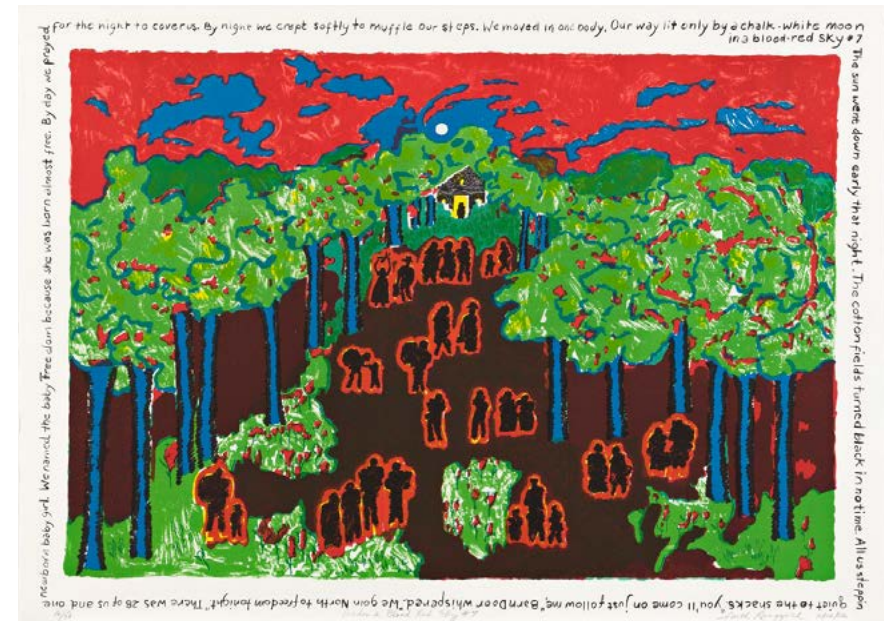
In Spinster Salt's from 'The Wing Museum' series

Art in the Age of Black Girl Magic

Tajudeen was doing exhibitions around the UK when she applied for a job at Tate. She didn't get it, but Tate asked her to return to devise a public programme. At the same time she was starting a PgCert at UAL, and developing ideas for a blog called *Art in the Age of Black Girl Magic* - building on the name of a movement highlighting the achievements of Black women. Her ideas for the blog were shaped into the course for Tate, which ran in 2018. It was a sellout.

"It was really interesting seeing the reaction of the public. The curators said usually a lot of white women attend so you might need to break down the kind of language you'll be using. We opened the doors and it was just full of Black women and Black non-binary people."

The course was run again in 2019, but then the pandemic struck. Tajudeen's response was to move the course online. It was another hit - and the catalyst for Tajudeen to start the Black Blossom School of Art and Culture. More than 600 students signed up in the first year for courses on Black British Art, Art in Revolutionary China and Curating Black Art. More is planned.



Faith Ringgold

Coming to Jones Road: Under a Blood Red Sky #8

Just talk about Black art

“People want to learn about Black and PoC art, to learn about art from women, but in art school it’s not happening, so why not just have these subjects happening?!”

This year, the school has launched **Black Blossom Journal**, inspired by the Black 80s movement and women like Lubaina Himid and Sonia Boyce. “They talk a lot about having people write about your work and the importance of that.” says Tajudeen. “I’m very interested in art histories but I’m also interested in my peers and our contemporary work and what we’re doing right now and how I can make sure that we’re not erasing the future.

“Talking about racism stops us actually doing our work, and that work is to just talk about Black art.”

BOLANLE TAJUDEEN

“So the journal is a platform for PoC writers to write about PoC art. The school, the journal, the art exhibitions – that’s what it’s all about – it’s about bringing that visibility.”

It’s not just about paintings

“Think about exhibitions at the Tate, with Sonia Delauny or Annie Albers; they’re not just great big monumental paintings, they work across costume design and textile practice and different art forms. We have to think differently about how we measure quality and creative work.

“Historically women have been incredibly creative. If you look at Art History, women have been at the forefront of all the technical developments, leaving painting behind a lot of the time and pushing the boundaries, largely because they had nothing to lose, or because they weren’t getting support for more traditional practices perhaps. We have to value those innovations rather than just think ‘Oh, they didn’t paint.’”

Dr Kate McMillan, Author, Representation of Female Artists in Britain (annual report commissioned by Freelands Foundation)

“I don’t think I’m invisible. I see myself, I see all the Black women in the audience, I see us. So if I see us, I’m not invisible. It’s just about making sure that we’re visible to everybody.”

BOLANLE TAJUDEEN, FOUNDER, BLACK BLOSSOMS



CHAIR:
PROFESSOR
DEBORAH
SWALLOW



ALICE PENNEFATHER

CHARLOTTE
EDMONDS



NAOMI
POLONSKY



SAM SARGANT



LUKE SYSON

PANEL DISCUSSION: LEADERSHIP

How have leaders got there, what are they trying to do, and what do we want from leaders?

Introduction

There is no prescribed route to leadership in the arts, but for a sector where there are so many women in general, the under-representation of women in top leadership roles continues to beg the question, why?

Common themes emerged from the wide range of experiences described by panelists, notably the role of champions and mentors in opening doors, creating opportunities and giving support.

Traditional notions of leadership are being re-evaluated, as Maria Balshaw articulated in her address to the conference. A fundamental challenge for today's leaders is how to guide change in their organisations in order to meet 21st century audiences and to be relevant in their communities.

As part of this, enlightened leaders - men and women - want to create places of work, creativity and art which are accessible,

welcoming and supportive for all. To succeed, they need to remove the barriers to fair representation for women of colour, non-binary people, and working class women. In a fast-changing world, leaders also need to be in touch with young people - in workplaces and audiences - who want their voices heard, and to be taken seriously.

Male allies, who share a commitment to fair representation and a more inclusive arts sector, are key.

But change is slow - especially in academic institutions. Prevailing systems and processes - particularly in traditional organisations - can narrow the chances of women reaching top positions.

The lack of diversity in governance is an issue which slows the pace of change. The prevalence of 'old white men' at the top of our national arts institutions suggests there is still bias - unconscious or otherwise - when it comes to the most senior appointments.

“Leadership is tough, whatever gender you are. Even as a leader, you are always accountable to others. Even when we want to do things, we can’t always do what we want to do.”

PROFESSOR DEBORAH SWALLOW
MARIT RAUSING DIRECTOR OF THE COURTAULD

KEY ISSUES:

- Leaders need champions
- What are leaders trying to do?
- Challenge accepted practice; make change happen.
- Amplify the stories told
- Collaborate
- What do we want from leaders?
- What's in the way?

Leaders need champions

Champions and mentors are vital to those with the potential to become leaders, and for those in leadership positions, the need for support does not go away.

Before being appointed to lead The Courtauld Institute, Deborah Swallow spent 21 years at the V&A. She was there when the museum appointed its first, and only, woman Director, Elizabeth Esteve-Coll, whom Swallow describes as “the single most significant person” in helping to shape her own career. “She was inspirational,” she says.

Among the opportunities which Esteve-Coll offered to senior managers, including Swallow, was the chance to develop new skills. Some did curatorial programmes; Swallow took a management course. “I learnt something about finance and corporate management, and that woke me up to real world and how organisations operate,” she says. “It’s a strand that set me up for my subsequent career at V&A, and when I applied for the role of Director at Courtauld.”

While training at ballet school, Charlotte Edmonds’ passion for choreography caught the eye of Rambert’s contemporary teacher Yolande York-Edgell, who invited her to work on her York Dance Project. Edmonds was also entering choreography competitions.

Growing awareness about the lack of women in the industry prompted the Royal Ballet Director, Kevin O'Hare, and Head Choreographer, Wayne McGregor, to champion the idea of an Inaugural Emerging Choreographer programme. The successful applicant would have the chance to work alongside some of the world's leading choreographers and with dancers of The Royal Ballet on developing their own choreographic projects. Edmonds was appointed. "It was a lifetime opportunity," she says. "I was incredibly lucky to have that.

"It was eye-opening in terms of seeing how Kevin O'Hare led the company, and how choreographers would orchestrate a room or facilitate a rehearsal. It really helped to shape me and help me to move into a freelance career which is where I am now - working predominantly with companies in Europe.

Funding can be critical to creating leadership opportunities. Naomi Polonsky is Assistant Curator of the Art Collection at Murray Edwards College - a post funded by Griselda Pollock, who used her 2020 Holberg Prize money to fund curatorial and research posts to promote women artists. "It's an amazing example of feminism in practice in the workplace," says Polonsky.

Polonsky, now covering the Curator's second maternity leave, is building on previous experience in a number of museums and galleries. "I've been lucky to have some unbelievably supportive mentors (notably during a placement at Tate Modern and at Murray Edwards College)."



Gayle Chong Kwan

Republic

“I’ve noticed, globally, a lack of women in my industry; it’s the first thing I see when I go into dance theatres.”

CHARLOTTE EDMONDS, CHOREOGRAPHER

CASE STUDY: THE OLD VIC

A highly publicised scandal involving former Artistic Director, Kevin Spacey, was the catalyst for the Old Vic to review and change workplace culture.

The review included investigations into how it felt for different people coming to work at the Old Vic, be they students, freelancers visiting for a day, actors coming for several months, members of the finance department, and so on. This has led to new awareness and a commitment to create a culture where people, whatever their role, feel they are supported and that their voice is heard.

“We’ve got a good idea of what our culture is now, and we don’t half go on about it, every single time we get the opportunity!” says Sargant. “In staff meetings we are embedding this all the time: the routes to raise concern, to speak to people, the support mechanisms that are there... these are what they are, and this is how you get to them.”

A tangible result of the Old Vic’s review is a scheme called the **Guardians Programme**, which involved training a group of staff, representing all levels, to provide a confidential sounding board for anyone within the organisation. “If you’ve experienced

something in a rehearsal room, or overheard something in an office and don’t quite feel that it’s sitting right with you, you can come and chat about it.

“What we discovered was that there may have been things going on, but nobody raised anything; nobody knew maybe where to raise things or how to raise things, or have confidence in the culture of the organisation that it would be dealt with in the right way.

“So, we’re trying to flip round that oil tanker. It’s a very different place now that we’ve got a new artistic director, but it takes time and it has been a big project. It’s something we have to keep going at all the time.”

The **Guardians Programme** has been shared within the industry, providing a blueprint for other theatres to adopt good practice.

“We went through bad stuff, but it enabled us to hold up a mirror to ourselves.”

SAM SARGANT, GENERAL MANAGER, OLD VIC

KEY QUESTION: WHAT ARE LEADERS TRYING TO DO?

● Challenge accepted practice; make change happen

“We’re talking about different kinds of leadership: about battle, about vigilance and about systems; about checks and balances and systematic methods within organisations which means we are always embedding these principles in everything we are doing and testing ourselves in certain ways all the time.”

LUKE SYSON, DIRECTOR,
FITZWILLIAM MUSEUM

Amplify the stories told

Deborah Swallow is proud The Courtauld is “a heavily feminised organisation, both in senior management and the student body.” Feminist and queer theories have helped to shape decision-making for some time, but there is always more to be done. “We’re trying to push against the narrow version of art history, and getting people into the teaching community who reflect much wider experience and ranges of art history,” she says.

“We’re doing this as well as the work going on in re-investigating the art histories that we we know; looking at them in a post-colonial perspective.”

Luke Syson is Director of the 200 year-old Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. “Institutions like mine need to be going out, finding and re-creating those histories so that when we are talking about our identity now, we have as complete a record of what our histories are and how we celebrate them,” he says. “It’s not about ‘either/or’, it’s about amplifying what we do.”

Naomi Polonsky worked on an exhibition for the Art Collection at Murray Edwards College, focussing on Scottish-Ghanaian artist Maud Sulter (1960-2008).

“I completely recognise the frustration of artists like Lubaina Himid who have been working for decades to try and get recognition. She and Maud Sulter worked together in the 1980s for themselves and other Black women artists. In the ‘90s there was total silence and lack of funding from public sources. They had no private wealth to fund their work. Lubaina Himid describes the ‘90s as the Wilderness Years. For some, that recognition has come late,” says Polonsky.

“It’s the responsibility of curators and directors to elevate them, research their work and produce archives on them.”



Lubaina Himid

Sour Grapes from The Wing Museum’ series

Male allies

When Luke Syson was at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, he worked with Sheena Wagstaff (Chief Curator at Tate Modern before moving to chair Contemporary Art at the MET) on the MET’s acclaimed 2018 exhibition, ‘Like Life’.

“Every single time we reviewed the loan list we looked at the gender balance and we looked at how many artists of colour we were including and we made sure that what we were doing was vibrant and balanced.

“To begin with, as a historian of historic art, I was very unused to this system and found it strangely uncomfortable and mechanical, but it gave rise to something which didn’t feel mechanical; it felt exciting, balanced and unusual.”

Luke Syson, Director, Fitzwilliam Museum

Madame Tussaud was not alone

One of the challenges to increasing the representation of women artists in collections is the dearth of historic records. Research in this area is both needed and rewarding. In looking into the history of creativity, researchers at the Fitzwilliam Museum are investigating, for example, the history of flower painting. “Not a fashionable subject,” admits Luke Syson, but one “where you find woman after woman of enormous distinction.”

Another neglected art form is waxworks. In a history that dates back 400 years, women were entrepreneurs and specialists in making models in wax, from anatomical parts to flowers. “They are fascinating histories but they are not easily accessible,” says Syson. “The works are often ephemeral and lost and we have to reconstruct them.”

Even where great women artists from the past are celebrated today, they are rarely given the same treatment as their male counterparts. “There is still a tendency to say ‘let’s celebrate Artemesia over here, but let’s pay much less for an Artemesia Gentileschi than for an Orazio Gentileschi at the National Gallery,’” says Syson. “There is still a sense that this is a token activity.”

Male allies

Sam Sargant grew up in a family which ran their own theatre: “I’ve always worked with women in leadership positions who I’ve looked up to, originally stemming from my mother,” he says.

Sargant estimates women hold 80% of administrative roles in the theatres he’s worked in. But, it wasn’t until he started work in the West End, that he became aware of the “huge problem within our industry of visibility of female representation.”

“We all know audiences in theatre are predominantly female, yet when you get up to the senior leadership positions, more often than not, the Artistic Directors are men, and the Directors and playwrights are men.

“The National Theatre has had five Artistic Directors and they’ve all been white men. The current one is the first white man who wasn’t Cambridge educated. From the peers I speak to, when any leadership role comes up within theatre, there is a very strong feeling that it just can’t be a man. We can’t keep going to that ‘white man default’.”

Sam Sargant, General Manager, Old Vic

“Roles only come up every so often, so it is slow, but I think - I believe - that it is happening.”

SAM SARGANT, GENERAL MANAGER, OLD VIC

Collaborate

Throughout the conference, speakers highlighted partnerships and collaborations - across different areas of the arts - that are lobbying for change, and making a difference. Leaders are in the obvious place to reach out to other organisations in their sector, to build alliances and make progress together.

“There hasn’t yet been a concerted unified effort, but I think it is beginning. Under Maria Balshaw’s leadership - who now chairs the National Museum Chairs Council - and with her support, the University Museums Group and Civic Museums Group are getting together to articulate clearly what we’re trying to do in terms of amplifying our narrative, making it more representative and more inclusive, making sure that people who come to our museums or visit our websites or experience our research in our collections see themselves and understand each other better as a result of that experience.” - Luke Syson

“I think it’s important for organisations like Black Blossoms to work with places like Tate. I’m working from the inside, and from the outside. We, the younger generation, we can mentor up.” - Bolanle Tajudeen

Learn by observing others

Charlotte Edmonds works in many countries, where she finds the different approaches - to ballet and to choreography - test, challenge, and inspire her own ideas. Crossing national boundaries, she still finds herself in a male dominated sector, and has to find a balance between competing ideas: “With each country, the experience of the dancers, the structures in place, the mannerisms and etiquette around the room; there are so many factors. If I’m there for a week or two, it’s a shape shifter, which has been valuable in terms of trying to find a way of leading. But I lose sight of myself if I don’t retain at least 50% [of what I’m trying to do].”

KEY QUESTION: WHAT DO WE WANT OF OUR LEADERS?

“We want them to listen to us and to take us seriously, whoever we are.”

NAOMI POLONSKY, ASSISTANT CURATOR,
MURRAY EDWARDS COLLEGE

“Now we have a much more complicated view of what leadership is. It’s becoming much more acceptable to change your opinions and to respond to a changing society and culture. One of the ways to do that is to hear from younger generations. Reverse mentoring is something that can be incredibly effective as a two-way conversation.

“In these last 10 years, so much has changed and the rate of change is very much accelerated in a positive way, but we all need to find ways of keeping up. Terminology and language are changing fast, and people should certainly educate themselves but we should be generous in the way we communicate with one another.

“Leadership is a huge challenge. Leaders are responsible for representing our institutions and organisations to the outside world, but also internally, you are managing your employees.”

On the issue of women supporting each other in the workplace, Polonsky says:

“Sometimes female directors can have a brilliant message that they can express externally, while not necessarily practising it internally. I’ve been lucky to have some unbelievably supportive mentors but I also hear horror stories, especially in the commercial art world - including a totally female working environment representing only women artists.

“It’s not just a question of representation but also how people treat each other. When people don’t feel supported themselves, they can’t be supportive of others.”

Polonsky believes that opening up discussions about issues like menopause, which can help explain why older women potentially are not supportive of younger women, is so important.

KEY QUESTION: WHAT'S IN THE WAY?

● Competing agendas and opposition to change

“Institutions are made of people. I have had very positive experiences with new curators who want to see change but who themselves have a problem with those more senior who want things to stay the same.”

BOLANLE TAJUDEEN, FOUNDER,
BLACK BLOSSOMS

● Lack of funding

Money is needed for new projects that can bring about change, and to train people to make them happen. Leaders need to find funding bodies for partnerships that will help to drive change.

● Lack of diversity on governing boards

“It’s important to think about the make up of governing boards. There may be gender diversity, but not so much age diversity. We need different voices and different backgrounds who are going to come with different questions. Boards make sure the organisation – whoever it’s led by – is held to account.”

SAM SARGANT, GENERAL MANAGER,
OLD VIC

When you think about arts and gender, what words first come to mind?



CALL TO ACTION

Conference participants worked in five workshops to explore ideas based on their wide-ranging experiences and insights. They considered the following questions:

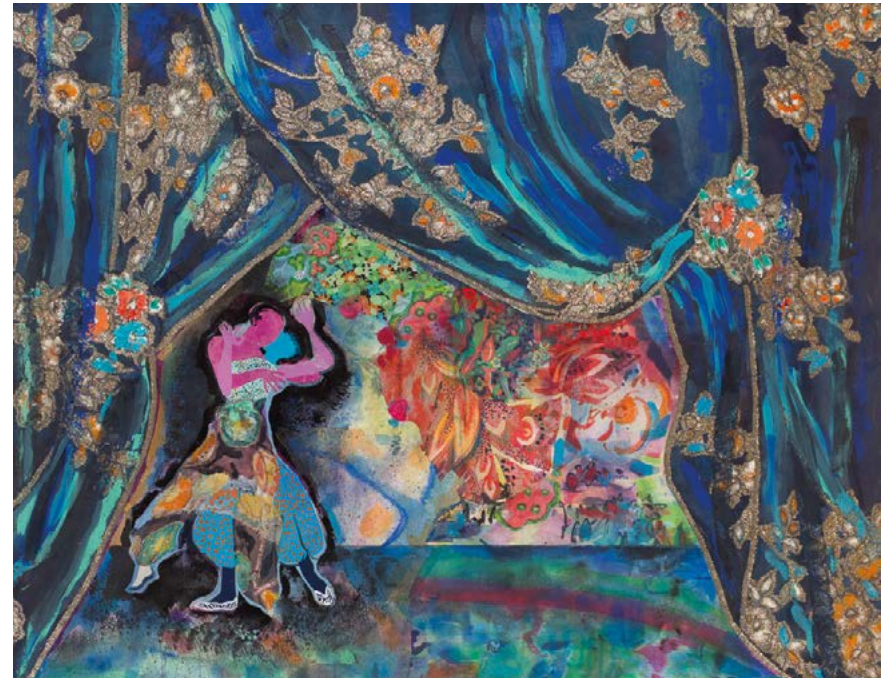
- **What is most likely to improve the diversity of women from different ethnicities and backgrounds in the arts?**
- **How can female creativity be equally valued within the arts sector?**
- **What is needed for fuller female leadership in the arts?**

Each group then shared a synthesis of their discussion, and workshop facilitator Phil Hadridge facilitated a collective distillation of ideas and priorities.

The outcome of this collaboration is the following Call to Action - a practical guide, drawing on the input of leaders, innovators and practitioners working across the arts.

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.



Miriam Schapiro
Madness of Love

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).
- 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 (for example, a-n The Artists Information Company).

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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