

# Latin America's Global Importance



## An Interview with Adrienne Arsht

**EDITORS' NOTE** *Adrienne Arsht is a business leader and impact philanthropist. She has taken a leading role promoting artistic, business and civic growth in the three cities she calls home: Washington, D.C., Miami and New York. Her \$30 million contribution to Miami's Performing Arts Center in 2008 secured its financial footing. In her honor, the Center was renamed the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts of Miami-Dade County. In 2012, her contribution of \$10 million to Lincoln Center was recognized with the dedication of the Adrienne Arsht Stage in Alice Tully Hall.*



Adrienne Arsht

*Recently, Arsht donated \$5 million to the Metropolitan Museum in New York City to fund the Museum's first ever-paid internship program, which now will be named the Adrienne Arsht Interns. With Arsht's gift, The Met is now the single largest art museum in the country to offer 100 percent paid internships to nearly 120 undergraduate and graduate interns each year. The transformative donation will also support MetLiveArts providing programming focused on themes of resilience.*

*In Washington, in 2016 Arsht spearheaded the creation of the Adrienne Arsht Center for Resilience at the Atlantic Council, which was renamed in 2019, the Adrienne Arsht-Rockefeller Foundation Resilience Center with the \$30 million Rockefeller Foundation gift that she matched. She also founded the Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center at the Atlantic Council in 2013 to focus on the role of South America in the trans-Atlantic community. Arsht is a Trustee of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts where she established the Adrienne Arsht Theater Fund. Arsht is a Vice Chairman of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, and Executive Vice Chairman of the Atlantic Council. She is a member of the National Advisory Board of the Sandra Day O'Connor Institute for American Democracy. Arsht is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and is former President of the Vice President's Residence Foundation and a Board Member of the Blair House Restoration Fund. At the request of the then Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, Arsht created the campaign Patrons of Diplomacy to establish an endowment for the preservation of furniture and works of art for the State Department. She is on the Advisory Council of the DC Volunteer Lawyers Project (DCVLP) where she established the Roxana Cannon Arsht Law Fellowship in honor of*

*her mother, which focuses on domestic violence and other urgent family matters. She was the inaugural recipient of the DCVLP Champion of Justice Award for her outstanding contributions to the organization's work to expand access to justice to low-income people in the Nation's Capital, especially those who are victims of domestic violence or have other urgent family law needs.*

*Arsht is Trustee Emerita of the University of Miami and an honorary board member of Amigos for Kids. In 2019, she was inducted as an honorary*

*member of the Beta Gamma Sigma society by the business school at Georgetown University. She received an honorary degree from her alma mater, Mount Holyoke College.*

*In 2019, Arsht was awarded The Order of Rio Branco from the Brazilian government for her outstanding dedication to U.S.-Brazil relations and her vision toward Latin America. In 2017, she was bestowed the Carnegie Hall Medal of Excellence recognizing her visionary and exceptional contributions to cultural and nonprofit institutions nationally. She is the only woman to have ever received this distinction. Additionally, Arsht was awarded the distinguished Order of San Carlos of Colombia, which was given to her by the direction of Colombia's President Juan Manuel Santos. In 2013, Arsht was presented with the prestigious diplomatic honor, Orden de Isabel la Católica (Order of the Cross of Isabella the Catholic), from The King of Spain.*

*A 1966 graduate of Villanova Law School, Arsht began her Delaware law career with Morris, Nichols, Arsht & Tunnel. In 1969, she moved to New York City and joined the legal department of Trans World Airlines (TWA). She then became the first woman in the company's property, cargo and government relations departments. Arsht moved to Washington, D.C. in 1979 where she initially worked with a law firm, then started her own title company. In 1996 she moved to Miami to run her family-owned bank, TotalBank. From 1996 to 2007, Arsht served as Chairman of the Board. Under her leadership, TotalBank grew from four locations to 14 with over \$1.4 billion in assets. In 2007, she sold the bank to Banco Popular Español. Arsht was named Chairman Emerita of TotalBank.*

*In 2008 she became the first, and still is, the only woman to join the Five Million Dollar Roundtable of United Way of Miami-Dade.*

*Arsht's other notable gifts include to Goucher College, creating the Roxana Cannon Arsht Center for Ethics and Leadership in honor of her late mother, a Goucher graduate, The University of Miami Arsht Ethics Programs, and a lab at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute of the University of Miami. In Delaware, Arsht funded the creation of a Best Buddies chapter to specifically serve Hispanics and African Americans with mental disabilities. The Chronicle of Philanthropy ranked Arsht number 39 on its 2008 America's biggest donors list.*

*She is the daughter of the Honorable Roxana Cannon Arsht, the first female judge in the State of Delaware, and Samuel Arsht, a prominent Wilmington attorney. Upon graduation from Villanova Law School, Arsht was the 11th woman admitted to the Delaware bar—her mother having been the fifth. She was married to the late Myer Feldman, former counsel to Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson.*

### What was your vision for creating the Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center (AALAC) and how do you define the mission for the Center?

*In 2013, I had the idea to create the Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center because a disconnect seemed to exist between Latin America and the Caribbean, as a region, and the opportunities it offers. There was, and still is, a need for greater understanding and prioritization of the region in Washington. Living in Miami, the U.S. capital of Latin America, I saw the potential to establish this first-of-its kind Center, a center dedicated to the region's broader global importance. My goal was to do what I could to put Latin America at the forefront of a broader global policy discussion.*

*The work of AALAC is focused on Latin America's strategic role in a global context with a priority on emergent and vital political, economic, and social issues that will define the trajectory of the region now and in the years ahead. In Latin America, combating the devastating health and socioeconomic consequences of COVID-19 requires unprecedented urgency and collaboration. That is why the AALAC is committed to finding ways to enhance hemispheric prosperity and why our work is more critical now than ever.*



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**Where did your deep interest in Latin America develop?**

My interest in Latin America goes back to 1964 when I took my first trip there. I travelled for one month from Machu Pichu to the Lake Country to the Iguazu Falls to Copa Cabana Beach, and I completely fell in love with the continent, its people and its culture. Living in such an international city as Miami has just validated my interest in the region.

**How engaged are you in the Center’s work?**

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In terms of engagement with the work, I work closely with Jason Marczak, the Director of the Center, and we’re in constant discussions about the current issues facing the region. I find the work the team does so impressive, and being virtual now, I have no excuse but to join in on all the amazing events the Center hosts. We have just launched a Caribbean initiative and are doing programs on the causes of migration from the Northern Triangle. We monitor the elections throughout the region and interact with the ambassadors from all of the Latin American countries.

**Will you highlight the diversity of talent that you have assembled to serve on the AALAC Advisory Council?**

One of the main pillars of the Center’s work is to focus on the region from a broader global lens, not just from the U.S. perspective. That is why I’m thrilled that we’ve built this Advisory Council composed of leaders who have been in high-level positions across the private and public sectors in Latin America, the United States, and beyond. Culture is also so important to understanding policy which is why we are delighted that Colombian singer Carlos Vives and Panamanian songwriter Erika Ender are Advisory Council members.

**You are results-oriented with your philanthropic work. How do you measure success for the AALAC and what is your goal for the Center’s impact?**

Success is when we are able to ensure that Latin American and Caribbean issues are part of the policy discourse in the United States and with our global allies and partners. One way we do that is to offer a platform for the region’s leaders – for example, in just the last few months, we hosted public events with Colombian President Duque, as well as with Prime Minister Rowley, the head of CARICOM (Caribbean Community).

Another impact metric is the AALAC ability to move the policy needle and have measurable impact on accelerating ties with the region by raising issues that are not at the forefront of discussion and finding solutions to these issues. Our U.S.-Colombia Task Force, for example, led by Senators Cardin and Blunt, has consistently worked in a bipartisan way to find consensus on advancing policy necessary for stronger bilateral ties. At the same time, the Center aims to push the envelope with the U.S. government by challenging U.S. policy in the region and offering alternative perspectives and solutions.

**What do you see as the keys to effective philanthropy?**

I learned as a child from my parents about the power and importance of giving back. One of my favorite quotes is from Mohammed Ali: “service to others is the rent you pay for a room here on earth.” I believe in and live that quote every day. I tend to be attracted to new, innovative ideas and to support work that is unique and will have a measurable, global impact. I am an active participant in the organizations to which I give.

**Your philanthropic work has made a major impact on so many lives. Do you take moments to reflect and celebrate what you have accomplished or are you always looking for the next challenge?**

I am always looking for the next challenge. I see something and I just go after it. To use a metaphor, philanthropy is like caring for plants, and while I’m not a plant person, I like to see the causes I support grow and flourish. Once you fertilize things, watching them grow is such a rewarding experience, but at the same time, I’m constantly thinking about how else I can be effective and use the resources I have to take on new challenges to assist in their growth and make lasting changes for the better.

Shortly after launching the AALAC, I realized we needed to talk about Resilience and that’s when I brought the idea to the Atlantic Council leadership to launch what is today the Adrienne Arsht-Rockefeller Foundation Resilience Center. In many ways, it serves as a complementary Center to the AALAC as it focuses on migration and climate change issues that are prevalent in Latin America. With a Biden-Harris Administration, there are new opportunities to accelerate impact in the region. In this reality that we’re living where the only certainty is uncertainty, it’s important to look at what new things can be done to partner with the region. ●