

Supporting Game Changers

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, DC, 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*



Adrienne Arsht

of \$10 million to Lincoln Center was recognized with the dedication of the Adrienne Arsht Stage in Alice Tully Hall.

Recently, in Washington DC, Arsht announced a \$25 million gift to endow the Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center at the Atlantic Council which she founded in 2013 to focus on the role of South America in the trans-Atlantic community. 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.

This past April, Arsht announced an \$11 million endowment gift at the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts in Miami, Florida. This gift will support a fully paid internship program creating greater and more equal access to hands-on professional experience in arts management and administration.

Arsht is a Trustee of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts where she established the Adrienne Arsht Theater Fund and is Trustee Emerita of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. Arsht is Executive Vice Chairman of the Atlantic Council and a member of the National Advisory Board of the Sandra Day O'Connor Institute for American Democracy. She 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, Hilary 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. Arsht 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.

In 2020, Arsht donated \$5 million to The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City to fund the Museum's

first ever-paid internship program, which is now 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 also supports MetLiveArts providing programming focused on themes of resilience.

Arsht is Trustee Emerita of the University of Miami and an honorary board member of Amigos for Kids.

In April 2021, she was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award from the South Florida Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and was the recipient of an Honorary Doctor of Arts degree from Barry University, located in Miami, Florida.

In 2019, Arsht 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, DC in 1979 where she initially worked with a law firm, then started her own title company. In 1996 she moved to Miami to run the 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 5th. A graduate of Mount Holyoke College, Arsht is a member of the Delaware Bar. She was married to the late Myer Feldman (d.2007), former counsel to Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson.

As a woman who has supported so many causes and been a leader in philanthropy, why is there not more notoriety for women in philanthropy?

Actually, reports in the media focus on the dollar amount of the gift, not the gender of the donor. Hopefully as more women give large gifts, there will be more women on the lists.



Exterior of the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts in Miami, Florida

What makes philanthropic work so important to you?

For me, it is that the causes I support will be game changers. Giving has been a family tradition and is a core value. I learned the importance of philanthropy and making a difference from both my parents.

Where did your passion for supporting the arts develop and what has made supporting the arts so personal to you?

My passion for the arts comes from my parents. There was always music in the house. My mother played the piano, and I took piano and ballet lessons. Every Saturday we would listen on the radio to the Texaco live broadcast from the Metropolitan Opera. I was fortunate to go to theater in Wilmington, Delaware and to New York City for shows on Broadway. I cannot imagine a world without the arts. When giving to the arts, you are preserving the essence of civilization for now and for hundreds of years to come. It is thrilling to know that a gift to the arts will be shared by people in a future we can't even imagine. Art is part of who we are and helps define us. It has been treasured for centuries and will continue indefinitely.

What was your vision for initially supporting what is now the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts of Miami-Dade County and has the Center become what you had envisioned?

There are so many exciting concepts that can be brought to fruition within a performing arts center. A performing arts complex offers an extraordinary value to a city. It brings art to every one of every generation and every interest. The Arsht Center has played a key role in the resurgence and transformation of the immediate neighborhood, the city and beyond. The money was raised, and the Center was opened, but it was disastrously managed. It was about to go bankrupt and would have had to shut down. With my contribution and new management, it then was able to be what it was supposed to be: a great performing arts center. The Arsht Center ultimately changed the city and revitalized downtown Miami. In the 16 years since my involvement, the Center has generated roughly \$3 billion in local economic impact.

In April 2022, you made an \$11 million gift to the Adrienne Arsht Center Internship Program which transformed the Center's internship program into a fully paid program, creating greater and more equal access to hands-on professional experience in arts management. Will you elaborate on your purpose for this gift and your mission to increase the diversity of the interns participating in the program?

It was a thrilling moment when I announced my gift at the Arsht Center's 16th Anniversary Gala in Miami this past April and challenged guests in attendance to join me supporting the Arsht Center. Inspired by the challenge, Eric G. Johnson announced a million-dollar gift on behalf of Baldwin Richardson Foods underscoring the importance of corporate and individual giving, I matched this gift with another \$1 million on the spot. With my gift, and the generosity of Eric Johnson and other supporters, we have ensured that future generations of arts administrators keep the arts in our lives and, at the same time, create pathways for greater diversity, access, and inclusivity.

Paid internships are an important step toward increasing opportunities and supporting equity in the art field. Unpaid internships are barriers for low-income students and people of color who may not be able to afford to work for free.

What was your vision for creating the Adrienne Arsht-Rockefeller Foundation Resilience Center and how do you define its mission?

When I founded the Adrienne Arsht Center for Resilience in 2016, it was to study resilience in many areas: financial systems, infrastructure, the human body, emotional and psychological resilience, disaster recovery, military training, immigrant, and refugee survival. A large part of resilience is preparing in advance for future challenges. In 2019, I matched a gift of \$25 million from the Rockefeller Foundation to endow the Adrienne Arsht-Rockefeller Foundation Resilience Center. Arsht-Rock is a leader in identifying, implementing, and scaling solutions to the urgent crises of climate change, migration, and security. We pioneered the concept of naming heat waves as well as having cities and communities appoint Chief Heat Officers in such cities as Miami, Florida; Athens, Greece; Freetown, Sierra Leone; and Monterrey, Mexico. These officials are charged with unifying the response to the challenge of heat to reduce the risks and impacts of extreme heat for their residents and constituents.

Do you feel that resilience can be taught or is it a trait that a person is born with?

Individual resilience is mostly genetic, but it can also be encouraged. You can learn from watching others, and decide, "I'm not going to give up." There are also situations triggered by stress that can cause cell changes. This is called Epigenetics. This aspect of genetics shows how your behaviors and environment can cause changes that affect the way your genes work for you as well as for future generations.

A large part of my interest in resilience was inspired by my sister, Alison. She was two years younger than I, and in 1969 at the age of 25 she was in the Soviet Union as a foreign-service officer and was taken by the KGB and accused of spying. The evidence was fake tape recordings. They released her the next day, but she came back shattered. Today, we might recognize it

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as PTSD, but then there was less knowledge of how to help. She committed suicide when she was 29. What made her less resilient?

Will you provide an overview of the Atlantic Council’s Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center and how you define the Center’s purpose?

I moved to Miami in 1996 to run family-owned TotalBank. Totalbank was founded by Cuban Americans. I became an “Honorary Cuban.” After selling the bank in 2007, I moved back to Washington, DC, but it became immediately clear to me that there was a need to integrate the interests of Latin America with Europe and the United States to shape the global future and to create a broad community of common values. In 2013, this became a reality with the creation of the Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center at the Atlantic Council. This Center is dedicated to forging an effective Latin America-U.S.-Europe partnership of common heritage and shared interests. I am thrilled to spearhead an initiative that will embrace Latin America as an integral part of the transatlantic world and give this vibrant region the recognition it deserves.

You announced in April 2022 a \$25 million gift to endow the Latin America Center. Will you discuss how this gift will ensure that the Center’s impact-driven work on this strategically important region continues for generations to come?

Over the past nine years, the Latin America team has worked to integrate the region more fully into the transatlantic community by fostering a new era of partnership and action among political, business, and opinion leaders of Latin America, Europe, and the United States. This endowment will ensure that the region will remain a priority and elevate the importance of Latin America and the Caribbean into an unknown future.

Why has it been important for your philanthropic work to include naming rights?

Putting your name on something lets the world know what matters to you. By making a naming gift you take a stand, and you show other people what you support. When I get a solicitation from any charity, I always look up the board members. I want to see who believes in this organization, and when I see it’s somebody I respect, someone whose core values I share, that tells me something about that organization. In this case, my gift told the community, “Take a second look.” The performing arts center was considered a white elephant at the time. It had been a financial sinkhole for years. But when I went ahead, the energy in the organization changed. Put your money where your mouth is and lead by example.

What do you feel are the keys to effective leadership and how do you describe your leadership style?

Effective leadership is the ability to get others to follow. It is being empathic and understanding and a good listener. That is how you get people to follow and to be engaged, although it’s harder than it sounds.

Riddle: What do you call a penguin in the desert? Lost...clearly the penguin did not have a leader.

You have achieved success in business and impact through philanthropy. Do you take moments to reflect and appreciate what you have accomplished or are you focused on what is next?

Success and accomplishment to me mean losing five pounds. Success is a judgment given by others. My energy and thoughts are focused on what is next. ●

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