

## **We Are A.R.T./New York, and We Demand Better**

To the A.R.T./New York Board of Directors,

We, the representatives of current and former BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Color) staff members at The Alliance of Resident Theatres/New York (A.R.T./New York), in solidarity with certain white allies, present this letter and list of demands as a unified front in an effort to name and dismantle the systemic racism rampant at this organization. James Baldwin taught us, “If [we] love you, [we] have to make you conscious of the things you don’t see.” We love the theater and we are here to tell you that, underneath your dress of respectability politics, your slip is showing.

Your slip is showing boldly; it looks like your predatory tokenism of BIPOC staff members, your opportunistic fundraising, and your calculated obstruction of anti-racist programming. Your slip has glaringly shown when staff and consultants witnessed your Executive Director lay her hand on a Black employee at a board recruitment event and say that change would not happen while she was in charge because she just wasn’t ready. Your slip continues to show when your board says, “We can’t afford ongoing anti-racism work,” but spends money on a life coach for your Executive Director, token HR consultants, and severance agreements with employees who call out your racism and abuse.

Your slip has repeatedly shown as your Executive Director perpetually demanded emotional labor from employees of color. We do believe in transformative justice and pray that hearts and minds can change, but the staff, particularly BIPOC, are not safe to do the work of undoing racism with her at the helm. She has abused her power to permanently damage the careers of whistleblowers and explicitly stated that the organization cannot progress on anti-racism work because she is not yet comfortable.

Your slip is fully exposed; the racism, and those who enable it, are deeply embedded in your systems, and we have no trust in the structures created within this institution to enact change. **At a minimum, we demand the immediate removal of the Executive Director, Ginny Louloudes.** Her presence is toxic, abusive, and an obstacle to progress. This fish is rotting from the head.

The following are a handful of documented incidents of her subversive and toxic behavior. Each of these incidents and more have been repeatedly reported internally with no action or support provided from HR or the Board of Directors. These lived experiences with Ginny have deeply impacted our ability to serve our members and to carry out our operations, our external communications, and the health and safety of our work environment:

- During the final panel adjudications for The Andrew W. Mellon Theatre New York Theatre Program, Ginny became visibly uncomfortable with the outcomes of the scoring and conversation. It was clear that many of her friends who lead predominantly white organizations and had historically benefited from this grant program were no longer going to be funded. She raised concerns about this to this panel and expressed concern about “reverse racism.” A power dynamic emerged in the room where panelists danced around her emotions, trying not to upset her while also defending their choices.
- When preparing for the 2019 Gala, Ginny continued to mispronounce a BIPOC contract artist’s name and attempted to joke with them about her struggle to remember. After the artist made clear that this was indeed offensive and requested to move on from the topic, Ginny repeatedly commented to staff and consultants that this artist was unprofessional and overly sensitive despite more than one conversation explaining the validity of the artist’s request. On multiple occasions, her casual comments went so far as suggesting that other artists be considered for future events to avoid further interaction.
- After several weeks of work to create a fundraising campaign supporting DEI (Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion) initiatives for December 2019, Ginny abruptly told the team to change course, saying directly to two BIPOC team members, “It won’t make money. The truth is our funders and our Public Board don’t care about diversity.” She also asserted that donors simply would not resonate with diversity like they would with accessibility or sexual harassment prevention, thus erasing the intersectionality of those three topics. Attempts to defend the campaign with field research were dismissed, and Ginny told staff members that she would not allow any further discussion on the matter.
- Following a traumatic shift in leadership in 2018, an HR consultant was brought on to provide confidential support for staff, at their request. As time went on, Ginny expressed to staff her frustration and disappointment with their meetings, claiming that these confidential sessions made her feel like something was wrong. Eventually, in an all-staff meeting, employees were informed that the consultant’s role was now to support the Executive Director directly and that all communications would no longer be private. There have been no efforts made to provide staff support in lieu of this change.
- In 2018, Ginny called a Latinx staff member into her office and presented the employee with a list of donor names. Ginny asked the staff member to read the list and tell her who might be Latinx based on their names. The staff member declined to do this and spent time educating Ginny on the underlying racism in this request. Ginny repeatedly asked this employee to spend dozens of hours in similar conversations where Ginny would ask questions about anti-racism and thus make the employee feel obligated to provide education and emotional labor, despite the fact that this was well beyond the employee’s

designated job duties. Ginny has made similar demands of other staff based on their identities (such as asking one self-identified queer employee and one self-identified West Indian employee all her questions about the LGBTQIA+ community and the West Indian community, respectively).

- In 2019, Ginny terminated organization-sponsored Affinity Spaces for BIPOC staff members to convene in confidence. These typically took the form of company-paid lunches for BIPOC staff to meet and connect with each other outside of the office. When she disallowed future Affinity Spaces, she claimed that anything paid for by A.R.T./New York must be accessible to all staff members, which has never been considered or enforced as a policy for any other organizational purchase.

- During the months of November 2019 to March 2020, Ginny continually misnamed a Singaporean Chinese immigrant employee both verbally and in written form. The two most egregious examples include calling her “Ling Ling” (a Chinese-born panda who has since died) and “Ma-Yi” (as in the Asian American theatre company). Despite apologizing each time she was corrected, Ginny nevertheless continued to make these unacceptable mistakes, indicative of her internalized racism as well as her severe lack of care. On this employee’s last day, Ginny also echoed anti-immigration sentiments in an email to this employee, that A.R.T./New York hadn’t been able to support the employee in her visa application process because they could not convincingly tell the immigration authorities that no American could do this employee’s job. This directly contradicted what the employee was told when she was hired: that A.R.T./New York would be able to support her in this process. Ultimately, the organization’s mishandling of visa-related paperwork ended in the employee’s termination and deportation.

- Despite all of the above transgressions, and more that are not accounted for here, Ginny Loulouides continues to name “diversity, equity, and inclusion” in her appeals to donors and remarks at events. She tokenizes BIPOC staff, Board Members, and programs like Diversifying Our Organizations for the benefit of herself and the organization, and she takes credit for leading the work around anti-racism in the field despite consistently undermining, devaluing, and harming the BIPOC staff members and allies who attempt to change the organization from within. It is clear from her actions that, in her position of power, she will continue to maintain the status quo of white supremacy within A.R.T./New York.

The racism, and those who enable it, are deeply embedded in your systems. Your Board, senior staff, and external consultants have protected Ginny and perpetuated racism despite the explicit pleas of BIPOC employees who continue to ask for support. Racism is a system and not a static action, making her removal merely the beginning of the work that must be done. For years, the staff members of color have been trying to lead the change within the structure of this organization. The time for discussion has passed. We demand action, acknowledgment, and transformative justice—and not just to remove your liability for being called out.

Racism and white supremacy are embedded into the very fabric of this industry we call the non-profit Off/ Off-Off-Broadway theatre arts sector. It is not enough to have a solidarity statement. Values and statements mean nothing unless they're backed up by leadership, programming, budgeting, and operations. We demand that A.R.T./New York back up their statements against racism with concrete actions. As a pillar of the non-profit theatre community directly serving 420+ New York theatre companies, A.R.T./New York has a moral obligation to lead the charge with regard to racial justice and to lead by example.

Many of you have known these issues for far too long and remained complicit despite our concerns. Our trust is broken, and we have no faith in the systems you claim to have in place to enact change. Therefore, in addition to writing this letter, we are sharing these grievances and demands with the members, your funders, and the theatre community at large. We trust that together, we can all hold you accountable for your complicity and transform the culture of A.R.T./New York, together.

In addition to the immediate removal of Ginny Loulouides, we demand:

- A guarantee of no retaliation—financially, verbally, or by the withholding of services and opportunities—against the current and former staff and any member theatres that come forward in support of this call to action.
- A protected line item in the organizational budget every year to continue anti-racism, equity, and inclusion work for both current employees and member companies.
- Ongoing affinity spaces for BIPOC staff and member companies.
- The creation of a secure, transparent, and standardized practice for reporting racism and microaggressions that does not leave staff vulnerable to abuse or require them to take care of the person causing them harm.
- The implementation of mandatory racial bias and anti-racism training for all board members and staff with direct reports.
- Finalize, approve, and update the organization's values to explicitly state anti-racism and anti-oppression as part of A.R.T./New York's mission.

To meet the above demands, we propose:

- **A working meeting with A.R.T./New York staff and the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors on Wednesday, July 15, 2020 without Ginny Loulouides** with the intention of drafting a formally announced plan to address these demands and dismantle systemic racism within the organization. This plan will clearly state the organization's updated values and detail timelines and action items to meet the demands listed above.

- Additional meetings (as many as needed) following this working meeting to revise and approve this plan before the Board Meeting scheduled for July 28th, 2020. This plan must be voted on and approved by the A.R.T./New York organizing committee before it is presented to the full Board.
- Approval of this plan during the July Board Meeting.

We care about the future of this organization, and do not believe that any person currently employed at A.R.T./New York is qualified or trusted to fill the position of Executive Director at this time. We demand that for a period of no less than 12 and no more than 24 months, an Interim Executive Director be brought in from outside the organization, vetted by our coalition, board, and members. We demand that any candidate seriously considered have a strong anti-racism practice and a proven track record of supporting the BIPOC community. We envision a candidate who identifies as BIPOC, disabled, and/or LGBTQIA+ so they can truly reflect the communities and audiences we serve.

During this interim period, we demand that the Board of Directors work with the staff to define the goals and values of the organization and collaborate in the search for, and vetting of, a more permanent Executive Director. We propose this as a solution, while holding space for the possibility that, during this period of value definition, it may be found that an alternative power structure might better serve the growth of the organization. **The true power of A.R.T./New York lies in the collective effort of its dedicated staff and the passion of its members. We Are A.R.T./New York, and our potential is even greater than our previous accomplishments. To define our strength and success as the result of Ginny Loulouides's leadership alone is not only inaccurate, but insulting to the dozens of abused laborers that created and continue to support the organization.**

We'll close this letter with some words from Ginny herself. During an internal staff meeting (on July 30th, 2019) to discuss the new values for A.R.T./New York, the conversation became heated around the decision to include the words "anti-racism" and "anti-oppression" in defining what justice and equity should look like for A.R.T./New York. These are Ginny's exact words:

"If I saw [anti-oppression], I would feel like that's an organization I can't belong to because I don't feel like I do that work every day...I think what I'm coming from is that my generation of cisgender white individuals feel like, right now, A.R.T./New York is valuing everything but cisgender white people. And that cisgender white people are not seen in these values because you say 'anti-oppression,' and you say 'diversity in all its forms,' and it says the word 'inclusive,' but they're not really included because they're discriminated. [pause] They are not getting all the same benefits. And if you do anti-oppression, you have to acknowledge that you are trying to right a wrong and you're going to basically shift the power. And if you're going to do that, and you have a white straight executive director, it doesn't make sense. **You know, I don't feel like**

**I should be running A.R.T./New York if you're going to shift the power. You need to have somebody else running A.R.T./New York."**

Listen to the audio recording of this quote [here](#) and view the full transcript [here](#).

**We Are A.R.T./New York, and we demand better.**

Signed,

The We Are A.R.T./New York Coalition:

Hope Chávez  
Melissa Dognazzi

Alyssa Garland

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**To add your voice and show your support for the demands in this letter, sign your name [here](#).**