

July 6, 2020

Dear Friends and Supporters,

As founders of *Being Forward*, the *Forward Art Prize* and the *Women Artists Forward Fund* we've been grappling with complex emotions, like many of you. Admittedly, we were saddened by the toppling of the Forward statue, but also deeply moved by the long overdue call for change that precipitated this action. We recognize the pain that has been caused by racial injustice and by the lives cut short, devalued and radically suppressed because of centuries of systemic racism. **We are committed to social justice and the important role it plays in art and society and are actively listening, learning, and seeking new ways for our project to be one small part of the solution toward change.**

The role of art has never been more necessary. As we begin a new reckoning with our historical past and dismantle former systems of power, we know that artists will help us find and create meaning, providing a unique lens for viewing ourselves and our society. Artists remind us of our shared humanity, of the beauty and pain around us, and of the importance of creativity and healing during times of unrest. The women who collectively funded the Forward sculpture in the 1890's and again in the 1990's advocated for equality, just as we hope to do now through the *Forward Art Prize*.

From our project's inception, we imagined re-contextualizing Forward through contemporary photographs that showed women's strength when the world has historically undervalued, underinvested in, and under-recognized women's capacities. We seek to recognize and support the skilled and diverse women artists in our community by amplifying their voices, while we re-examine Forward's history from new perspectives.

We recognize that the history of both art and feminism have left women of color especially silenced and underrepresented. While we found the multi-layered stories of women supporting one another through the arts an inspiring jumping off point in Forward's history, especially since women couldn't vote or claim custody of their own children, we know that others see Forward differently. Today representation of or by any woman is hardly better, with only 5% of work in major museum collections created by women, leaving a jarring gap in understanding. For women of color this number is more dismal.

It is our hope that the *Forward Art Prize* will provide skilled female artists substantial unrestricted cash prizes so they can create and share representations of the world *they see*, from *their own* perspectives. We're doing our best to respond to the urgency of our time by making the *Forward Art Prize* as transparent, equitable and accessible as possible. **Here are our equity-related accomplishments from 2019. With your help we:**

- Created the third largest art prize for women visual artists in the country.

- Received applications from women of color representing 25% of total applications.
- Recruited a 2019 jury that included 40% women of color. *(In 2020 our jury will be 60% women of color)*
- Awarded two *Forward Art Prizes* of \$10,000 each, one going to Dakota Mace, a Diné (Navajo) textile and mixed media artist.
- Presented semi-finalist awards of \$1,000 each to three women of color, out of a total of five awards, with support from Dane Arts.
- Selected Dyani White Hawk (Sičánǵu Lakota) as our keynote speaker for the *Forward Art Prize Award Ceremony*.
- Awarded 52% of the available prize money to women of color.
- Offered three workshops to give all applicants accessibility and assistance with resume and statement writing, photographing their work and help with the on-line application process. The majority of workshop participants were women of color.
- Curated and exhibited the work of 45 of 70 female applicants in our exhibition, *Women's Work*, at Central Public Library. All applicants were invited to participate.

While we are proud of these accomplishments, we know there is more work to be done. We plan to greater diversify our advisory board, reach more artists, and increase the number and diversity of our supporters. **You can help us in three meaningful ways:**

1. ***Spread the word!*** Please tell everyone you know about *Forward Art Prize* which **will award \$25,000 in unrestricted funds in 2020. The deadline for applications has been extended to September 1st at midnight CDT.** Application materials and criteria can be found at <https://www.womenartistsforwardfund.org/grant-recipients>.
2. ***Recommend*** exceptional women of color with skills in the arts, community engagement or fundraising to serve on our advisory team. Please send recommendations to bird.waff@gmail.com or brenda.waff@gmail.com
3. ***Consider a special gift*** to the *Women Artists Forward Fund* in honor of an important woman in your life. Now, more than ever, we need your support to ensure that our community is enriched by the diverse voices of women artists far into the future. Give a gift in any amount at <https://www.madisongives.org/womenartists>

Our best,

Brenda Baker & Bird Ross

Co-founders

Being Forward, Forward Art Prize & Women Artists Forward Fund

