

Discovery Ep. 9.mp4

[00:03:08] Hello and welcome to Discovery Knight Foundation, a weekly program on the arts. I'm Preus, or car director of arts at night. And today I'll be discussing how to center the arts in New York City's present and future with Connie Martinez, CEO of S.D. creates a network of creatives and arts at creatives and artists and an art service organization based in San Jose, California. Thank you for joining us. Connie, welcome. Thank you. Thank you for being here. I'm so glad to be here. So for folks who might not be familiar with your work, Connie's career spans decades in the arts, business and civic leadership and bringing those together in service of artists and communities. And I'm so glad to get to talk about this important topic with you today, Connie. I just want to briefly say to viewers that we will be doing some Q&A toward the end. So please submit any questions you might have in the Zoome chat or if you're watching on Facebook, live into the comments function there. So, Connie, maybe we could just start briefly with learning a little bit more about SB creates. And if you could just tell us a little bit about the work that you do.

[00:04:29] Sure. You started by saying we are an art serving organization. So that's where I would start. So a nonprofit. And in some circles we would be considered an intermediary for the arts and others on their slices of what we do. That's definitely in the Arts Council lane. But in Silicon Valley, we call ourselves venture culturists. And so we use the lens of our our local culture and what resonates here. So what that how that translates into our work is that we hold a portfolio of about 100 arts organizations and we steward their success. And all of our work falls into three categories, building the capacity of our arts ecosystem, raising their visibility and voice, or increasing access to the arts. So that's sort of the organizing principle. And we embrace the the ecosystem as if there are portfolio.

[00:05:29] Thank you. That's really helpful. So as as we think about those three areas in which your work is concentrated, you know, those are things that were, you know, essential prior to the pandemic. And and, you know, I think some would say have become, you know, perhaps even more important to it to focus on, given what's happening now. But as you look back on, you know, your your decades of work in this area and the work that creates has been doing. What do you see as being some of the key challenges that you've seen when, you know, arts and culture hasn't necessarily been included in an integral way in community planning or development or anything? Also that you've seen where it's it's it's actually been addressed. A key challenge that's been addressed in in really what you would view as a successful way as you think about recurring themes over the years.

[00:06:39] So specifically to the challenge. As you can imagine, and I know you have an audience that's beyond Silicon Valley, but just the noise and to compete with the the iconic power behind our tech industry and to actually be noticed. I think that's a huge challenge. And so our approach has been less about trying to be in the center and more about integrating ourselves into all these civic conversations. And so so the challenge is, is that there's not one simple entry point and so much of the Valley's leadership and the progress we make is really connected to the networks. And so you have to actually be in the network. And so the time that it takes that for those of us here in the sector to sort of dedicate ourselves to going beyond the arts community and actually being present in networks that aren't the usual suspects, if you will. And so there is the issue of getting attention in a valley that you know of zero on ones and and iconic, you know, innovation and global recognition. So there's that piece. And then it's spending the time to develop the relationships because that's where you actually make inroads. So I think that's the challenge side. On the on the upside is that once you do engage because the valley is so collaborative and and in fact, logic and reason, you can bring logic and reason into those

conversations, but always sprinkle it with the the heart. So you lead with head, if you will, because we live in our heads in Silicon Valley. But you you you never let go of the heart. And so again, it depends on what the conversations about. It depends on who is in the conversation. And it's sort of like you have to navigate what resonates in that moment for that for that particular audience. Did I answer that question predicted?

[00:08:45] You answered it beautifully. And. And I guess I'd love for you to maybe just kind of talk a little bit more if we follow that thread a little bit. I think one of the things that, you know, anyone who's who's sort of working in this space and advocating for arts and culture to be, you know, at, you know, part of those conversations in a group, whether it's central to or integrated within these community discussions.

[00:09:13] And I should acknowledge, you know, I think on on this on this episode, we probably have folks tuning in who who are artists who are with organized arts organizations, arts and culture organizations, and also who are probably in those other sectors, you know, who also care about how to move a community forward.

[00:09:32] And so I guess one of the one of the things that I think continues to be a bit of a tension in, you know, arts advocacy sort of conversations is what arguments work. You know, obviously acknowledging different things, land with different audiences. And as you just as you just mentioned. But there's I think that what keeps coming up now and then is this question of whether to emphasize, you know, arts. And I'm totally using the shorthand of arts for art's sake, but recognizing that's a shorthand by essentially, you know, those sort of the benefits or the intrinsic value that art has that people view art to have versus then there's other community benefits that we also know the arts and culture brings. And in fact, a recent. A study commissioned by Knight Foundation Foundation that community ties, that you examined many different parameters of what cultivates community bonding and community togetherness. And one of the key elements was, in fact, arts and culture. And so what have you found to be. It sounds like you use did you emphasize different components of that, depending on who you're speaking with? But I wonder if you could tease apart a little bit more, maybe even if you have an example or two of of how you found approaching that differently has worked.

[00:11:08] OK, so I'm going to set aside a moment that, you know, the elected officials, the issue of economic impact is always relevant to them. OK. And that's kind of in the small business category of, you know, what what do we generate as an industry in terms of local economic impact in Silicon Valley? That's pretty tough to make that an argument when you're talking to the titans of industry. You know, in fact, when we've done research on this, the entire ecosystem in Silicon Valley is equal to some one small division of one company. So to make that argument doesn't work. What I have found recently in and I was invited to be part of the Silicon Valley recovery roundtable. Fifty nine leaders, c suite level of Silicon Valley, heavily, heavily weighted towards industry. So I was the only arts person on there and had an opportunity to get to know a small group of high level executives from industry over the course of a couple of months. And what I learned in those conversations is that once again, as I referenced earlier, you know, you lead with a had logic reason and all of that. And so what resonated with them is when I was able to talk about the industry, the arts and culture industry as a community serving small business pay so that we don't get recognized when a region comes together and says, let's save small business. We're not necessarily recognized in that realm. And if and we're not recognized, we're prioritized in the realm of basic needs nonprofits. So like we're in between. And so my my value proposition was, is that that that we have an industry. We have artists that are of value to this community, that they're underemployed in this moment. And it's part of the, you know,

earned income march in March, earned earned income disappear just like all the small businesses earned income. So so that made sense to them. And then I think the other part that made sense to them was that using sort of the business modeling techniques that they are familiar with and putting out a case that for a relatively small investment, meaning that if you're in trying to sell hunger, housing, you know, health care, that's billions of dollars in our sector. It's a relatively small fifteen million dollars could be leveraged dramatically by this sort of network of projects that could essentially employ our artists community. And to my surprise, and I had five minutes to make this pitch, I was invited and then I had five minutes to make the pitch. And the 15 person high tech group unanimously embraced the idea. And part of it was, is that logically it makes sense to them.

[00:14:20] And then it also felt feasible and relevant in this time of need to do real projects in our community of value, placemaking arts education, storytelling and health messaging. So that's one example of seizing the moment, given the audience to make a case.

[00:14:43] Yeah, that's great. Thank you. So I definitely heard you sort of bridging different different arguments and sort of merging them into one cohesive sort of case. That was fine tuned to that particular moment and that opportunity.

[00:15:00] Yeah. And if I could add in and it kind of goes with my earlier comment. The thing that we you know, we often judge people's intentions and sometimes they're wrong. You know, we are judgments are wrong. And, you know, I went into this conversation somewhat skeptical. I came out actually hopeful. And part of it is I go back to this. You know, we've got to have the logic, the reason, the data, the business case, the business plan, all of that in Silicon Valley. By the way, those of you who are in other regions of the world, I'm not pretending you're like us, nor in some cases would you want to be. But the other thing we have to remember is these people are parents. They want their children to be exposed to culture. They have their own creative expect expression that is soulful. So they're human beings. So that's where I'm saying don't stop making the argument with logic and reason and all of that. You've got to sprinkle in the heart, the soul, and you know, it's the truth. Judy, truth, beauty and justice is also important to every human being.

[00:16:10] Thanks for reminding us of that, Connie, and I do.

[00:16:13] I appreciate that the acknowledgment that Silicon Valley is a unique environment.

[00:16:21] And at the same time, I think a lot of what you are sharing with us today are sort of principles and conditions we've observed in other communities as well. And I think, you know, folks tuning in from all over will be able to relate to various pieces of that. I want to just come back to something that you mentioned with that last example of of the the group of leaders that are working toward recovery for covert 19. So, you know, as you as you noted, you know, artists are a an industry. The arts are an industry that are underemployed right now. You know, probably most of the folks are all the folks tuning in are aware of how hard hit arts and cultural sector has been with the pandemic.

[00:17:12] And at the same time, I think we've been seeing how artists have also been really central to our communities coping with the pandemic. You know, it's that some of the truth and beauty, you know, that I think people are really connecting around.

[00:17:31] And then they've also been really stepping forward. Among the first, I think, to, as we've seen in many communities, figuring out how to put their skills and their, you know, special kind of expertise to use to contribute to community resilience and recovery. And I wonder if you could just talk a little bit more about also what that looks like in this moment. You know, San Jose is one of the communities in which the public funding for the arts has taken a hit due to, you know, the city governments shifting of shifting of funding to things that also relate to COVID-19 recovery in some cities. Philadelphia is just one example where an arts and culture office of the city was, in fact, eliminated. So so a lot of communities are struggling with some of these infrastructural and financial shortfalls. What are some of the things that you are seeing happening with folks coming together, whether it's an arts or the other sectors that you're working with to address, address this shortfall? And what do you see as being that the risks of maybe not. You know, if we don't do that in the end, whether it's near term repercussions or a longer term repercussions?

[00:18:59] Well, say, I think that there's two parts to that question that you just posed. And the first is about, you know, how are they? How are the artists showing up as second responders in this time of need? And what we're finding is incredible creativity and risk and resiliency among the artist community. I'm not saying they're not suffering, just like those small business community and, you know, having lost their income, but they're figuring and figuring out a way and to some degree that the fact that we are our ecosystem has never had what I would call the legacy organizations, the large, well-funded, most often Eurocentric. We don't have the overhead that a lot of other regions have, but that makes sense. So there's some resilience built in. OK, back to the. The the city and the local government. The primary source of funding that the city of San Jose has for the arts is the transient occupancy tax. The hotel tax, you know, that's there round the hole. People use that across the nation. So people are pretty familiar, especially in the arts. So as you can imagine, that's hit been hit incredibly hard. Hey, so I think the example I would want to give you is that how if we coped. I think the first thing is, is that the leaders of the arts have come together initially to just sort of support each other. I mean, this is really hard times. So it was initially sort of the comfort of having a group come together. And there's a group of us that are part of the American Leadership Forum, which is a multi-sector network. But the segment that our arts leaders started meeting every Monday morning and the reason I'm bringing that up is that that group. Had conversations with elected, invited, elected in. We had strategies of how we would make our case and not go to the city as the, you know, whoa, are we whining arts community? But rather, how can we be of service in this time of need? How can you leverage us so that we can not only make it through this pandemic and this this crisis we're in, but that we're actually there on the other side? Okay, so we started having these conversations, very human, very, very thoughtful and numbers matter. And so by the end of this, we had pitched a whole series of recommendations. And the one that stuck and actually has played out is that as a result of that, the CARES money that came from the feds, they backfilled our TOTN with two million dollars. And I'm not saying it was just one voice, one leader or one conversation, but it to me, it was a proof point that when the arts organize for the benefit of the community and have a voice, it matters.

[00:21:57] Thank you. That's helpful. And we have a question from from Mitzy that I think relates to what you were just mentioning is could you talk about placemaking and how the arts can contribute to that goal? And I'm going to just broaden it a little bit as well. I think if you could also share some of these ways that either you've already seen the arts contributing to resilience and recovery in, you know, in your area, in your geography or

some of those things that you were you all brought to the city to say, here are ways we can contribute.

[00:22:35] So first of all, I kind of want to say out loud that, you know, Salib Z grew up. You know, over a course of a few decades because of Silicon Valley grew up fast. And so it doesn't have the history that a lot of American cities of our size would have. And to that point, we're an unfinished city. So the arts have played a very important role in giving the texture and the activation to public spaces as the city grows into its potential. And in fact, we've been there when nobody else has been there. So. And you have a group of of leaders who truly care about this community in a very authentic way. So there there has been an impact. I think right now we're the leaders of the arts community are engaging in conversations with the city and in fact, are playing leadership roles about reopening activation activation and physical public spaces are what placemaking is about. So to create that texture and in those things that that bring people not only into the space but in, you know, nurture their experiences, if you will. So, you know, those specific examples I think are are current and but they're also a decades of coming, if you if that makes some sense. I don't know. Go back to the question. I don't know if I really hit it completely.

[00:24:15] Well, the question is about how artists can contribute to the goal of placemaking. And I do think you hit that and that it's sort of hard to event was about what you're seeing happening in this moment or some of those recommendations that your group made to the city.

[00:24:32] And so in I think I'll give one more example, which isn't necessarily pandemic driven, but it kind of goes back to that being at the table. You first have to get invited. And then you have to show up and you have to to have a broader view of the world. In my view, and not just arts centric, that gives you credibility, but that makes sense. So one example where we weren't invited is the Google development. Probably folks on the line have heard about this national news, huge major development being planned for downtown San Jose. We were not on the community advisory group. We weren't invited. And they had many, many, many, many meetings. And to be honest, I wasn't paying enough attention to this issue. And so it wasn't like I made it an issue, but rather we were working on developing the relationship directly with with Google, developing a relationship, understanding what their needs were, what we had to offer. And I think I mean, the jury's out. But we've organized, you know, thoughtful community conversations with arts leaders and Google. And as a result, we're seeing we have seen some progress in terms of how our input has impacted their development. And that didn't come by being in your face. It came from listening, showing up with the intentions to do both of us on both sides to do something better for our community. I think there's great power in that. And there's nobody better to be in those conversations than the arts.

[00:26:18] Thanks, Connie. I think something that you brought up is really kind of resonating with me in terms of other conversations that we've been having on on this show, on other Knight Foundation shows and other program areas as well, which I think is especially, I think comes up even more with this. I think heightened attention to equity in our communities. And so and that is the question of the table. So you mentioned and and understanding this is the way that this works can be different from one community to the next. But there is that question of who isn't inviting to the table, getting invited. How do you get invited? All of that. But what I heard and what you just said is in a case where you weren't invited to a table, you built a relationship, you developed a relationship and then sort of built your own table or created a table where then you were convening people.

[00:27:18] And I think that's something that is also important for folks to think about in terms of who's who's building the table, who's do the doing the inviting and how that can happen in an equitable way. And I wonder if you could talk a little bit, too, about how that's manifested or maybe the importance of that in at least in your area. You know, I just want to. Knowledge to that San Jose is one of the largest cities in the country. It's also one of the most diverse communities. San Jose and Silicon Valley. And so how? And you're serving a wide range of organizations and artists in that community. Can you talk a little bit about that idea of the table and equity?

[00:28:00] Yeah. So I'm going to go back to a couple of things that I touched on. But integrate this issue into it. And part of it is the message that this is a moment for the arts to really amplify, to elevate and amplify our voices relative to the issue of racial equity and inclusion. OK, so I think there's an opportunity for us to leverage this moment across our country. And where it showed up is the the we would never have had the conversations we had with the Silicon Valley recovery roundtable. But for the social unrest that our country is experiencing. So it kind of opened the door for that. And I think in answer to your question, I don't think we should be timid about setting the table, inviting the others to our table. And it works best if you actually have relationships to begin with that are outside of the arts. So that that that authenticity and in relationship over time. So it's not just that we're leveraging this moment, you know, for our own interest. It's like we already have relationships of this community. This now is an opening to talk about things that may not have been able to talk about before. And we are the best medium in which to have those those conversations. I experienced it firsthand and the Silicon Valley Recovery Roundtable.

[00:29:29] And, you know, I I'm actually a big fan of enlightened self-interest with an emphasis on the enlightened part, because Silicon Valley companies, you know, have the most diverse workforce, you know, in the one of the diverse, most diverse workforces in the world. So they have and the workforce is their greatest asset.

[00:29:54] Right. In this, you know, knowledge, brainy economy that we're in. So it's in their best interest to pay attention to this. And so when the arts can when they can start seeing how the arts can play a role in it, our credibility, our value goes up. And so I think that's the moment we're in. So I think two parts to the issue being at the table. You have to have relationships and you have to give outside of your little bubble of the arts to actually sometimes be invited and be noticed. And the other side of it is, is that you don't be timid about setting your own table.

[00:30:33] Thanks.

[00:30:34] I want to bring in another couple of questions from viewers before we wrap up. So one actually relates to that, and I feel like you've touched on it. So, you know, let me know if if there's not anything additional, you would you would say. But one of the questions is beyond the pandemic, how can we get arts advocacy into the mainstream political and or public service conversation?

[00:31:05] Yeah, I think I mean, part of it is, is leveraging the moment we're in and then in those relationships and the conversations where the arts are in service to the community and and continuing them. So, you know, don't stop after a crisis is, you know, essentially build on it. And so I think that's part of the answer. And it it it's you know, as leaders of the arts, it's kind of on us to make certain that we don't let go. Hey. And the other thing is, is to the degree that we are during this time, there are proof points that may not have been

obvious to our our communities before that we actually that gives us strength and credibility as we move forward. So part of it is, is don't give up the fight, accelerate.

[00:31:57] Thank you.

[00:31:59] And then another question. This is sort of a more specific question that has to do with recovery, but also with community resilience and sustainability. Wendy asks, would if corporations provide one time grants to artists for a short term project creation, will that do anything to build community resilience, recovery and sustainability?

[00:32:21] Yeah, I don't think, you know, there's an intervention and then there's this long term strategy of building resiliency. And so I'm not pretending that some of what our work that we just shared with you isn't one time. But if you take that one time and then leverage it in relationships that didn't exist before. I think you are building towards a longer term resiliency. And by the way, the intention of our, ah, recommendation, we call it the Silicon Valley creative core, was a public private partnership whereby the private sector leveraged the public sectors investment, some of which is already there. Right. But it hasn't been hasn't been a channel or we haven't challenged the sector or been successful at them investing. So that concept, in my view, is not just an an intervention strategy, it's a longer term strategy. Once again, it takes a lot of work to do that. You've got to build the bridge and then you've got to stay on the bridge.

[00:33:24] Yeah, that's great. And I think it leads well to one closing question from one of our viewers from Heather, with extreme reductions in city budgets other than funding. What are other ways you recommend to cities to help sustain the arts community?

[00:33:44] OK. Well, that's that's a great question. And and everybody needs money. We know that. But I think what we're learning in this time of crisis is that we also need each other. So we're gathering we're having the almost these small group gatherings with different segments of our arts community. And part of it is, is to learn from each other and share what works and doesn't work. But it's also just moral support during this time. So don't underestimate that the importance of that. We've also of. And just like everybody else. We all all of our capacity building programs. We have you know, we're now providing them online and in the virtual experience is now focused on the issues of dealing with the recovery. So there's content that we can provide our community. And we've certainly gotten good reviews on some of the programs that we've, you know, we've pivoted to. So there's that piece. You know, the whole advocacy, we've probably done more advocacy for the arts in the last, you know, 10 months than we've done in the last 10 years. And so that is important in the moment. But it's also important to leverage going forward. So those are some of the sort of non-cash things. And then I think this whole issue of connecting the arts leadership to civic leadership, that's beyond the arts. To use this as a as a moment in time where we are really, really relationship building across sector. So whatever we can do to facilitate that, I think, and in whatever our city can do to facilitate that would be helpful. Thanks, Connie.

[00:35:31] Great. Great advice. Thank you so much. We are. We're out of time. So I want to thank you again so much, Connie, for being with us and sharing these insights from your work. I want to just mentioned a report that I believe came out from the working group that you mentioned. Connie, let me know if I if I got that wrong. But it's called building a better normal.

[00:35:56] And you can find that online. And we'll put the link in the chat. And also wanted to let you know about Content magazine, which is an arts focused publication. Connie, do you want to say a quick word about content? Magazine.

[00:36:12] Yeah. You know, I mentioned those three book bubbles of capacity building visibility and voice raising the voices. This is the content magazine is our version of amplifying the voices of our local artist community in a beautiful publication. And all of the social media and event programs that go along with it. So we publish quarterly now. And it has created a network of creatives who feel supported and connected to one another. So, yes, thank you for mentioning that content magazine. Jeff, Daniel Garcia is the creative genius behind it and we are the publisher.

[00:36:53] That's great. And I and I can vouch that I when I'm in Zann has a I see it everywhere. And folks outside the arts mentioned content magazine and often have a copy nearby. So that's a great example. So, again, thank you, Connie. Thank you, everyone, for tuning in. We hope you found some of these ideas and and tips to be helpful next week. Please join us on Friday, September, September 11th, when my colleague Chris Barr will be joined by Catherine Yu, executive editor of No Proscenium, to discuss from life to live streams about how performing arts organizations are adapting during the pandemic and what they can learn from early experimentation in this realm and what opportunities exist to create rewarding experiences for attendees and creators alike. And for those of our viewers who are in Miami, just want to give a quick reminder that the night new work, Miami Open call for new work in the performing arts, just such as the kinds of projects that Chris and Katherine will be talking about, that open call closes on Tuesday, September. Tuesday, September 8th at eleven fifty nine pm. And you can find information about that in the chat. Might the same same Chris Bar, my colleague, composer, our intro music and our exit music is by action jazz artist Aaron Brown. Thank you to all of our Knight Foundation colleagues who work hard behind the scenes to make this show happen every week. And until next time, we wish you good health, safety and joy in our thanks and take care.