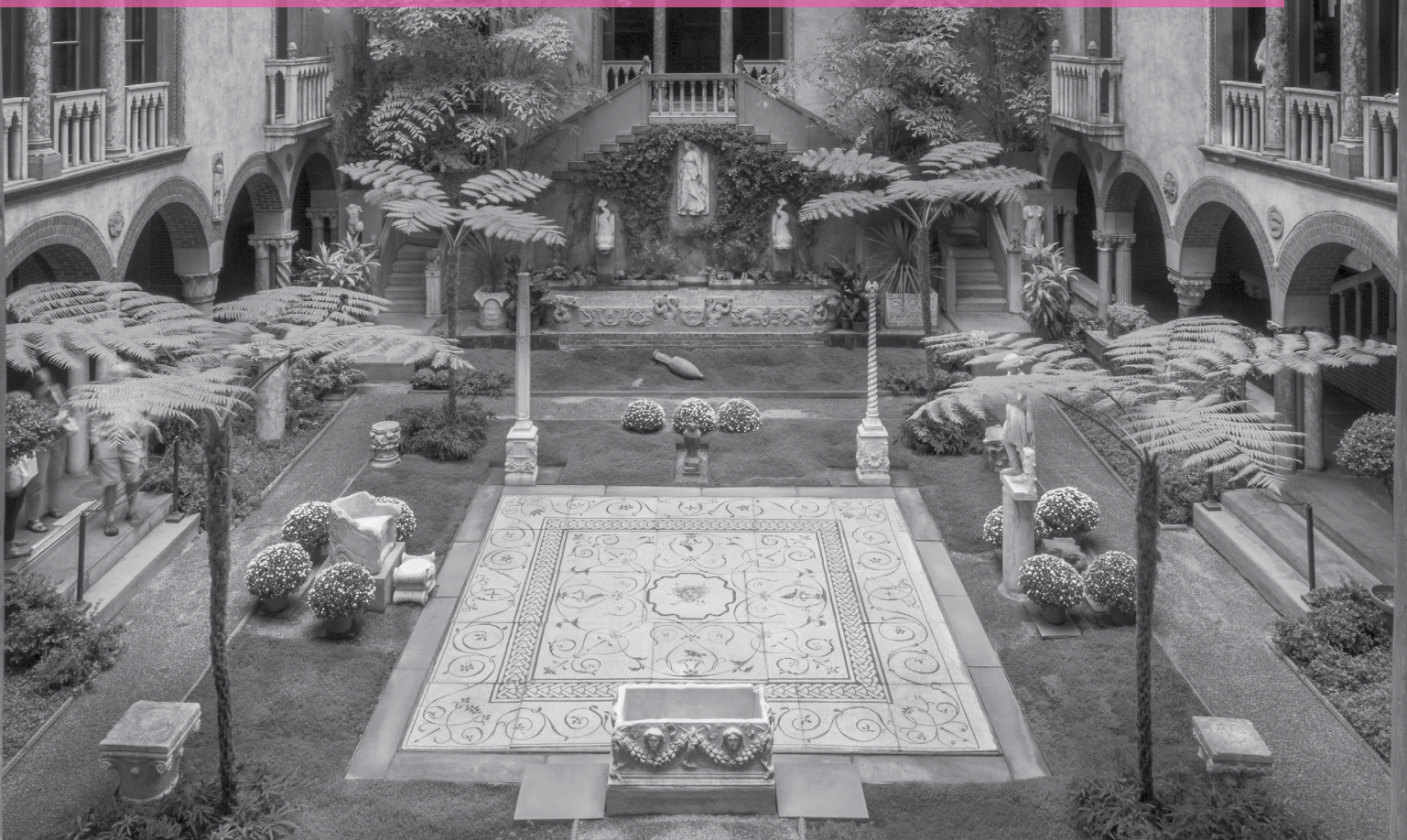




# ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, ACCESSIBILITY  
& INCLUSION (DEAI) UPDATE

DECEMBER 2021







# DEAI COMMITMENTS

*We value diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion as drivers of staff empowerment, innovation, and institutional excellence. We believe multiple perspectives and a healthy respect for differing views strengthen our organization by expanding our thinking.*

*We embrace the challenge of exploring the complex stories embedded in our history and artworks as we work towards continued relevance of the Museum and collection to each visitor.*

*We work together as Board and staff to ensure that our members, partners, and key stakeholders reflect and embrace these core values.*

*The Gardner is an inclusive Museum that welcomes everyone. All visitors and staff have the right to a safe, respectful experience at the Museum. Discrimination or harassment will not be tolerated in any form.*



# INTRODUCTION

*Diversity, Equity, Accessibility & Inclusion (DEAI)* is one of the four institutional values articulated in the ISGM strategic plan. In 2020, the Gardner established both board and staff teams to focus on the ways we manifest this commitment throughout the institution. Recognizing that for an organization to truly change, each of us must incorporate these values into our ongoing activities, decisions, and interactions, we follow a model of distributed responsibility and leadership.

We proceed on this journey with necessary humility, and acknowledge progress while recognizing continued opportunities for improvement. Every department and Board committee has established DEAI learning goals and re-examined its priorities and operations to ensure value alignment and to develop goals and tactics that demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the Museum's overall DEAI strategy.

This update, which is organized within the framework of the ISGM DEAI Commitments, covers the first half of fiscal year 2022. It represents the ongoing integration of DEAI into the fabric of the Gardner's organizational culture. We will continue to hold ourselves accountable by monitoring and sharing our successes and challenges as we create, innovate, and collaborate to live our values and renew the promise of Isabella's public mission.

## MUSEUM LEADERSHIP & GOVERNANCE

Advancing our institutional governance to reflect the diversity we are seeking and uphold a high standard of leadership by adhering to term limits (making room for new voices, expertise, and points of view) for all Trustees and Advisors:

- The current composition of the Board is 34.6% identifying as non-white, which represents a 3% increase over the previous fiscal year.
- In FY22 the Board of Trustees continues to work toward its goals for Board development, with new Trustees and Advisors reflecting an emphasis on diversity and contributing new perspectives as outlined in the Museum's Strategic Plan.
- The Board DEAI Task Force meets biweekly and guides continued Board learning on DEAI issues, most recently holding DEAI learning sessions at both the September and

December Board of Trustees meetings, and implementing continued Implicit Bias training for the Board of Advisors at their November meeting.

- The Board DEAI Task Force has worked to deepen its engagement with each standing committee of the Board (Finance, Development, Investment, Audit, Conservation and Collection, and Governance) by holding individual meetings with committee chairs. The intentional overlap among members of the Task Force and Governance Committee helps ensure prioritization of DEAI goals in Board recruitment and engagement processes.

## **INDIGENOUS LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

*The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum resides on the homelands of the Massachusetts Tribe, who belong to this place and continue to regard these lands and waters as sacred.*

A land acknowledgment is a formal statement and public recognition of the longstanding history and continuing presence of Tribes who were here before white colonizers arrived, pushed or forcibly removed Indigenous Peoples from the land, and changed the uses of that land. Motivated by respect for Indigenous Peoples, these statements are used by cultural organizations to confront their legacies as agents of colonialism and the perpetuation of often colonial narratives and practices. Land acknowledgments recognize that Indigenous People remain and are an integral part of the land today, and will be for many generations to come.

The Gardner Museum collaborated with Massachusetts Tribal leadership, our local Indigenous partners, and our statement, developed in partnership with them, respectfully reflects an active and ongoing relationship. The Gardner's Indigenous Land Acknowledgment was voted on and approved by the Board of Trustees at the December meeting. And, at the beginning of 2022, we will implement new guidelines for the use of the land acknowledgment.

We commit to a genuine exchange with our partners and to reflection on concepts of archive, collection, colonialism, and more. Together we will shift the narrative to one of respect, reckoning, and, in time, reconciliation. The statement is not the end of our commitment and our partnership, but the beginning.

## **ALL GENDER BATHROOMS**

We recognize that everyone should be able to use a restroom that is safe and accessible. All Gender Restrooms are restrooms that can be used by anyone regardless of their gender identity, expression, or embodiment. All Gender Restrooms are both a public health and a public safety issue. Individuals who do not identify as binary female or male are sometimes denied access to public restrooms or may be subject to harassment or violence when



accessing binary-gender-specific facilities. Additionally, All Gender Restrooms offer options for families with children and adults with caregivers.

The Gardner is piloting All Gender Restrooms in the New Wing in early 2022 and will continue to explore more comprehensive, future restroom improvements. The Gardner will improve signage and messaging about the different restroom options available throughout the museum.

## **INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE & EXHIBITION RESOURCES**

We are committed to learning and continuous improvement, including how to better use accessible and inclusive language that considers the feelings, wishes, rights, traditions, lived experiences and viewpoints of others. Building off of work started with the exhibition *Boston's Apollo: Thomas McKeller and John Singer Sargent*, we continue to develop institutional guidelines for terms related to racial and ethnic identity, gender and sexual identity, accessibility (non-ableist), and social justice. This work is manifested in resources provided for exhibitions, which in this period included *Titian: Women, Myth & Power* and *Being Muholi: Portraits as Resistance*. For both exhibitions we implemented staff and Board training.

As part of our work towards being a welcoming and inclusive institution for all audiences, we created content notes to alert visitors to potentially triggering themes in *Titian: Women, Myth & Power* and contemporary exhibitions. All staff members and volunteers participated in workshops with a local educator with expertise and scholarship in gender, sexuality, and identity. Additionally, educators from the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC) led virtual workshops for exhibition and frontline staff about understanding sexual violence and learning to better support visitors who are survivors of sexual trauma. BARCC staff also consulted on content notes for the *Titian* and *Mary Reid Kelley* and *Patrick Kelley* exhibitions and offered resources shared in the Museum's [Statement on Sexual Violence](#).

We offered a glossary of terms for *Being Muholi: Portraits as Resistance* and implemented two exhibition-specific staff trainings. We also provided a reference guide for those looking for more information on community-based LGBTQIA+ resources, organizations, or readings. Staff and Board training sessions support our ongoing education about terms for gender and sexual identities.

## **ACCESSIBILITY WORKING GROUP**

This year, as an extension of its staff DEAI Strategy Team, the Gardner convened an Accessibility Working Group representing a range of staff responsibilities. The Accessibility Working Group will help the Museum develop greater competency around inclusive practices

and will provide recommendations to address the accessibility of the Museum and its website as well as best practices for equitable and inclusive programs and exhibitions.

In the first half of FY22, the Gardner's Accessibility projects have included:

- Massachusetts Cultural Council Universal Participation Innovation and Learning Network (MCC UP).
- Visual Descriptions for Exhibition Images and Collection Objects: For visitors who use assistive technology, visual descriptions allow for more equitable experiences in accessing the Museum's collection. Website users with low or no vision are able to use screen readers and speech input software on the online collection database. The descriptions highlight parts of an object that are important to understanding the piece: the subject, size, medium, materials, color, orientation, etc. This year, the Gardner added 217 visual descriptions to the collection database online, bringing the current total to over 1000 descriptions. Visual descriptions are now offered in the online Gallery Guide for many objects on view in the special exhibitions. During the time period reported, visual descriptions were used for paintings on view in *Titian: Women, Myth & Power*.
- Website Improvements: With the assistance of accessibility consultants, the IT staff conducted an accessibility review of the website considering both Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and ADA standards and identified high priority improvements to address this year and next.
- Program and Event Improvements: Fall 2021 programs included consistent messaging to help visitors feel welcomed and safe, including the ISGM mask policy, anti-harassment policy, and when needed, a content note about issues addressed in the program.
  - For visitors with disabilities, we experimented with various accessibility resources for on-site programs, including:
    - Accessible seating in Calderwood Hall
    - Coordinating parking spots for performers
    - Information about accessibility accommodations in marketing materials,
    - Designing a film with Abilities Dance featuring captioning, ASL, and visual descriptions, paired with live ASL during Q & A and welcoming remarks
    - Provided clear masks for participants during Q+A and for staff working event



## COLLABORATIONS

Amplifier projects highlight change-makers working towards social justice through the arts. Both of our FY22 Amplifier projects took place this fall during Free First Thursday programming.

The first program, *Indigenous Perspective: The Gardner Museum* featured a film screening and panel discussion with three Indigenous activists and artists: [Elizabeth Solomon](#) (Massachusetts at Ponkapoag), [Erin Genia](#) (Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota), and [Mar Parilla](#) (Afrotaíno Borikua). These three local Indigenous cultural workers discussed historical museum practices, manifestations of settler colonialism, cultural landscapes, and the potential of art in decolonization.

For the second Amplifier project, [Abilities Dance](#) performed a variety of dances with the vision “to disrupt antiquated ableist beliefs and disseminate the value of inclusion through dance.” This resulted in a commissioned film in response to the Gardner’s special exhibition *Titian: Women, Myth & Power*. The film included performances from dancers who have diverse identities within and outside of the disabled community, which they bring into their co-choreographic creations with Founder/Executive & Artistic Director Ellice Patterson. The public film screening included Q&A with the choreographers and performers.

## DEPARTMENTAL DEAI WORK HIGHLIGHTS

ISGM staff continued their department’s DEAI work in the following areas:

- Increased transparency and communication
- Furthered accessibility
- Hiring processes
- Collection scholarship, analysis and publications
- Diverse voices and perspectives
- Staff learning and training
- Welcoming messaging
- Financial relationships