



# ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, ACCESSIBILITY  
& INCLUSION (DEAI) UPDATE

JUNE 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. We recognize that for an organization to truly change, all of us—from individual staff members to departments and cross-functional teams to senior leaders to the director and trustees—must incorporate these values into our ongoing activities, decisions, and interactions. That is why we have taken an integrative approach using a model of distributed responsibility and leadership.

As we proceed on this journey with necessary humility, we 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, 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.

**During FY21<sup>1</sup>, the Gardner affirmed and acted upon the DEAI commitments in the following ways:**

## MUSEUM LEADERSHIP & GOVERNANCE

- Worked together to develop budget strategies and secure necessary financial support to maintain our full workforce throughout the entire COVID-19 pandemic without furloughs or salary reductions.



**\$500,000+**

total contributions to  
Board-initiated Resilience Fund

---

<sup>1</sup> The Museum operates on a fiscal year beginning on July 1 and ending on June 30. A DEAI Update was last posted in January 2021.

- Secured a partnership grant for ongoing anti-racist work in exhibitions, building upon lessons learned through community collaborations in the *Boston's Apollo* and *Shen Wei* exhibitions.
- Reviewed Board policies and practices to assure inclusivity and worked to meet annual recruiting goals that uphold our DEAI commitments.

- The Board goal for FY21 was to elect four to six new trustees with at least half identifying as people of color. While the Board elected only three new trustees in this year, two of the three identify as AAPI and BIPOC.



BIPOC and AAPI on Board of Trustees

BIPOC and AAPI on Board of Advisors



- The Board reviewed and approved changes to the Trustee Expectations document. It now prioritizes Board community building and personal development with emphasis on the DEAI work.

- Continued Board learning on DEAI issues, including education and training sessions, guest speakers, and collaboration with the Director to structure ongoing discussions at Board meetings concerning DEAI issues.

- The DEAI Task Force met bi-monthly and routinely reported on progress of ongoing Board DEAI initiatives while facilitating further discussion of how the Museum integrates marginalized perspectives, community involvement, and new narratives in its exhibitions and programs.
- A DEAI Task Force member represented the ISGM Board and participated, along with ISGM staff, in the Massachusetts Cultural Council's Universal Participation Initiative's Winter/Spring 2021 cohort, a program that provides in-depth professional development in concepts around accessibility, including leadership, peer networking, education in universal design principles, audience engagement strategies, and ADA compliance.
- Trustees took part in an important webinar related to DEAI and philanthropy which featured Darren Walker, President of the Ford Foundation, and Jim Canales, President of the Barr Foundation. Both foundations are nationally recognized for their commitment to arts, culture, and social justice and currently support ISGM DEAI work in exhibitions and related programming.

- DEAI Task Force conducted listening and discussion sessions with chairs of the standing committees of the Board (Finance, Development, Investment, Audit, Conservation and Collection, and Governance) to help determine how the work of each committee can/will reflect the DEAI commitments. Several ideas for shifts in practice were discussed and will be revisited in the new fiscal year.
- The Board of Advisors completed the first half of Implicit Bias training and will complete the second half in November 2021.

**42**

total hours of Implicit Bias training for staff and Board

## HIRING AND HUMAN RESOURCE POLICIES

- Engaged in equitable hiring practices and recruiting strategies that emphasize different lived experiences and various types of expertise (that have not been historically valued within the art museum sector) and helped to diversify the employee candidate pool.
  - Revamped recruiting strategies by broadening the range of skills and experience sought among volunteers and staff; expanded resources for sourcing diverse candidates; enlisted a wider array of search firms and employment services; and evaluated the success of these methods to ensure rigor and equity in the recruitment and interview process.
- Embedded DEAI commitments into the employee onboarding process.
  - All staff hired through April 2021 have participated in the institutional Implicit Bias training program. An internal team of Implicit Bias trainers conducts this training on a quarterly basis and continues to develop additional workshops to deepen staff cultural competency and awareness in more specific areas of DEAI.
- Integrated DEAI competencies into the performance evaluation process for all employees.
  - All employees set an individual goal for FY21 centered on DEAI and were asked to reflect on their contribution to department DEAI goals as well.

**21%**

BIPOC and AAPI on full time staff

# PLANNING AND COLLABORATION

- Continued to update and evolve the exhibition and interpretation planning process to center critical, diverse, and local voices in exhibition development, interpretation, and programming.
  - Implemented the community contributor model in interpretation for upcoming *Titian: Women, Myth & Power*. The female subjects in each of Titian’s mythological paintings and the fates that befall them, especially at the hands of men, raise questions of gender, power and sexuality as relevant today as they were in Renaissance Spain. The Museum invited six scholars and artists, with an emphasis on queer and feminist perspectives, to respond to Titian’s paintings in a series of brief audio responses entitled “*Reconsidering Titian Today*.” The contributors, many of whom are previous Gardner Museum partners or collaborators, were invited based on their interests and engagement with questions of power, agency, and sexuality, both in their own work and in challenging the dominant narratives of art history. All responses will be available via our website and QR codes onsite throughout the exhibition.
- Focused greater attention on increasing accessibility.
  - Developed touch and American Sign Language (ASL) tours for visitors with low or no vision to be offered in January 2022, after Museum Teachers are trained.
  - Established standards and improved accessibility for public and internal websites, including making over 1000 visual descriptions, written by volunteers, available for collection objects and exhibition resources on our public website.
  - Translated labels for *Shen Wei: Painting in Motion* exhibition into Chinese Mandarin to broaden accessibility.
- Worked to increase representation of businesses that are owned and operated by marginalized groups in our vendor and supplier relationships across the Museum.
  - Initiated Vendor Diversity Questionnaire to support this initiative.

1,069



visual descriptions of Collection objects to be used on website prepared for visitors with low or no vision

## We Dream in Colour

This Black-owned jewelry collection is a Gift at the Gardner best-seller

- Developed successful bookstore collaboration with Porsha Olayiwola, to promote and sell her book of poems, *sometimes i shimmer, too*. Olayiwola is a queer, BIPOC ISGM Artist in Residence (AIR) and her book was one of the best-selling items in the store in FY21.

- Prioritized co-creation and mutually beneficial, meaningful collaboration by building on a long history of ongoing relationships with artists and performers that are Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) and Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI). Supported social justice through commissions and partnerships with community organizations dedicated to cultural and artistic equity.

**38** artists who created Luminary Lens (Collections-based) and Amplifier Project (social justice-focused) commissions

**13** local community and cultural partners



- Continued implementation of the Neighborhood Salon Luminaries, Polly Thayer Starr Studio Artist programs (95% of participants identify as BIPOC), and Community Engagement programs through two new video series *Luminary Lens* and *In the Studio*. *Luminary Lens* will become a hybrid series in the fall, featuring pre-recorded films with live Q & A discussion with the featured artists. The *In the Studio* film series will likely pause this fall as we restart hands-on interactive activities in the studio with local artists in person.
- Completed two community-based partnership projects with Chinese Folk Art Workshop and Pao Arts Center related to the *Shen Wei: Painting in Motion* exhibition. Both projects centered the lived experiences and inspiration of local Chinese and Chinese Americans through art. As a reflection of our commitment to ongoing support, the Museum publicly voiced its solidarity with and provided a platform for the AAPI community to articulate its own perspective following the most recent acts of violence against its members.
- Participated in the ongoing collaboration with indigenous Tribal leaders to co-develop our institutional land acknowledgement as well as to design programming that centers indigenous history and lived experiences in what is now known as the Fenway area. (Results of which will be announced this fall.)
- Deepened our ongoing partnership with Boston-based ensemble Castle of Our Skins through the creation of *Witness: American Spirituals and the Classical Music Tradition*, a four-part video series that explored the ways some Black American composers found inspiration in the rich tradition of spirituals.

**2,500**  
# views of *Witness: Spirituals and the Classical Music Tradition*

- Ushered in the second cohort of Gardner Ambassadors from Bunker Hill Community College. The 10 paid interns, 61% of whom identified as BIPOC, worked in 10 departments across the Museum and successfully completed the semester-long experience despite COVID limitations.



**69**

teachers working with over 3k students from 33 Boston Public Schools in Thinking Through Art program

- Created a new membership level aimed at attracting 100 younger more diverse adults by the end of the fiscal year. The Museum exceeded its goal and welcomed 267 new 30 and under members in FY21.



**267**

new members in the Under 30 membership level

- Continued to build knowledge of Chinese and Japanese and other non-Western art in the collection through collaborations with outside experts and scholars

**1,026**

Collection objects catalogued bringing total to 17,000+ to date