



ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, ACCESSIBILITY
& INCLUSION (DEAI) UPDATE

JUNE 2022



DEAI COMMITMENTS

We believe that including multiple perspectives as well as respect for differing views and lived experiences expands our thinking and strengthens our organization.

We recognize the circumstances of race and class in our country as integral parts of the story of our founder and the creation of the Museum. We embrace the challenge of exploring, interrogating, and acknowledging the sometimes difficult narratives embedded in our institutional history and artworks.

We invest in the continued relevance of the Museum through rigorous scholarship, and the mindful conservation of its objects. We amplify the historical significance of the Collection while engaging it to examine the ongoing issues of importance in our society.

We emphasize learning and continuous improvement and commit ourselves to sharing the goals and reporting our progress to our community on a regular basis.

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.



INTRODUCTION

Diversity, Equity, Accessibility & Inclusion (DEAI) is one of the four institutional values articulated in *Renewing the Promise*, the Museum's 2019-2024 Strategic Plan. In 2020, the Gardner Museum 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, each of us must incorporate these values into our ongoing activities, decisions, and interactions. We proceed on this journey with necessary humility, and acknowledge progress while recognizing continued opportunities for improvement.

This update covers the second half of fiscal year 2022, from January to June. It represents the ongoing integration of DEAI into the fabric of the Gardner Museum's organizational culture. We will continue to hold ourselves accountable by monitoring and sharing our successes and challenges as we create, innovate, and collaborate, live our values, and renew the promise of Isabella's public mission.

A PLACE OF COMMUNITY, A PLACE OF RESPECT

One of our fundamental goals is for our visitors, staff, volunteers, trustees, collaborators and co-creators to experience the Gardner Museum as a place of community and respect. We embrace the wide diversity of views and lived experiences of communities and individuals. We advanced this goal in this fiscal year with the following commitments and initiatives:

Indigenous Partners Working Group

In the first half of fiscal year 2022, the Gardner Museum took steps to deepen its relationship with Massachusetts Tribal leadership, our local Indigenous partners, by committing to a genuine exchange on concepts of archive, collection, colonialism, and more. At our first working group meeting, we discussed the Gardner Museum's mission and community commitments, learned about the Massachusetts Tribe's interest in this shared work, and explored future programming ideas.

We collaborated with Massachusetts Tribal leadership to develop an Indigenous Land Acknowledgment. This 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. The statement is on our website and is shared with our public on social media, in spoken remarks offered by staff or, whenever possible, by members of the Board of Trustees, and in print or presentations, as appropriate.

Contemporary Exhibitions

The Gardner Museum organizes dynamic exhibitions that connect the collection and Isabella's legacy to diverse audiences and contemporary issues. *Being Muholi: Portraits as Resistance* and *Drawing the Curtain: Maurice Sendak's Designs for Opera and Ballet* allowed us to broaden the interpretive perspectives and elevate artistic voices of special exhibitions.

- ***Being Muholi: Portraits as Resistance:*** This contemporary exhibition explored the life and work of internationally renowned photographer, visual activist, and Gardner Museum Artist-in-Residence Sir Zanele Muholi (b. Durban, South Africa). For over a decade, Muholi, who uses they/them/their pronouns, has documented South Africa's Black LGBTQIA+ community. Muholi's self-portraits and portraits of the LGBTQIA+ community are in part a statement on the representation, commodification, and politicization of the Black body.

38,000

of visitors to *Being Muholi: Portraits as Resistance* from February to May 2022

The Gardner Museum embraced an inclusive interpretation strategy with representation from the Black and queer community. We invited theo tyson, *Penny Vinik Curator of Fashion Arts*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, a curator who invites conversations about the sociocultural implications of race, gender, identity, and sexuality through a lens of fashion and culture, to co-curate the exhibition with Pieranna Cavalchini, *Tom and Lisa Blumenthal Curator of Contemporary Art*, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.

The Gardner Museum also commissioned Boston Poet Laureate and Gardner Museum Artist-In-Residence Porsha Olayiwola to create new poems in response to Muholi's work, which were featured in the exhibition and in a live spoken-word program.

- ***Drawing the Curtain: Maurice Sendak's Designs for Opera and Ballet:*** Maurice Sendak (1928–2012), author and illustrator of beloved children's books, was an avid fan of music who had his own successful "second act" as a set and costume designer for opera and ballet. Like his children's books, these stage designs present worlds that are both magical and mysterious, joyful and volatile, places where one might feel at times like an outsider, a theme which resonated with Sendak's own lived experience.

Organized by the Morgan Library & Museum, *Drawing the Curtain: Maurice Sendak's Designs for Opera and Ballet* includes more than one hundred enchanting illustrations, detailed dioramas, and clever costumes created for stage productions. The Gardner

Museum's exhibition features newly imagined immersive play areas and new interpretive labels exploring Sendak's lived experience, including how his sexual and religious identities influenced his exploration of character and his views on childhood.

Community Collaborations

The Gardner Museum organized nine public programs related to both *Being Muholi: Portraits as Resistance* and *Drawing the Curtain: Maurice Sendak's Designs for Opera and Ballet* in the second half of fiscal year 2022. Many programs featured BIPOC speakers and artists, and all of the programs connected to the Muholi exhibition, as well as our Juneteenth program, centered and celebrated the experiences of Black, LGBTQIA+ individuals.

"From our brilliant curators to our coordinators and directors to our amazing lineup of writers, performers and artists, it was everything I needed to remind me of myself. Thank you for all the hard work and thoughtfulness that went into and behind this massive lift in the name of love, identity and a special kind of revolution."

- **Lyrinspect**, author and activist on *Speaking Volumes*,
March 2022

Future Archive Project

In a community engagement project inspired by the exhibition *Being Muholi: Portraits as Resistance*, the Gardner commissioned WBUR producer Arielle Gray to convene an intergenerational group of Boston-based artists and cultural creatives to document the intersectionality of Blackness and queerness here and now. For Black trans and queer people, documentation of the self is a subversive act, a proclamation of personhood and autonomy in a world where Black LGBTQIA+ communities are actively erased from dominant archives. Featuring activist Chastity Bowick, artist Ifé Franklin, creator JD Stokley, photographer Tyahra Angus, and rapper Mercedes Loving-Manley, this Gardner-sponsored project resulted in a series of audio stories and portraits by photographer OJ Slaughter that captured these artists as they wanted to be represented.

Weekend Concert Series

The Gardner Museum offers the longest-running, museum-based concert series in the United States. The Music Department is committed to broadening representation and diversity to better reflect our communities by highlighting the musical contributions, both compositions and performances, of women and people of color.

40%

The percentage of works by composers of color and women composers performed in the Fall and Spring Weekend Concert Series

The Music Department also commissions new compositions that explore themes embedded in the collection to produce musical experiences unique to the Gardner Museum. This year, the Gardner Museum commissioned an edition of a previously unpublished violin sonata by William Levi Dawson (1899-1990), an oft-overlooked composer and vocalist. Performed by violinist Randall Goosby and pianist Zhu Wang, Dawson's *Violin Sonata No. 1* received its modern day premiere in April 2022.

Free Admission for Ukrainian Passport Holders

The United Nations estimates that nearly 6 million refugees have fled Ukraine, seeking safety, protection, and assistance abroad. In the summer of 2022, in partnership with other Boston museums, the Gardner Museum offered free general admission to the Ukrainian community who, whether temporarily or permanently, found Boston and its surrounding towns home. We hope that in our galleries and in our Courtyard, those who are suffering from this war and the humanitarian crisis found space for reflection and solace.

ACCESSIBILITY INITIATIVES

Accessibility Working Group

An extension of its staff DEAI Strategy Team, the Accessibility Working Group is designed to help the Gardner Museum develop greater competency around inclusive practices and provide recommendations to improve accessibility across the museum, its platforms, and its offerings. This year, the group managed the Museum's participation in the Massachusetts Cultural Council Universal Participation Initiative, which aims to activate the aspirations of the Americans with Disabilities Act to break down the barriers that prevent full civic participation in Massachusetts' cultural sector. The Museum underwent an onsite assessment this year and its next steps will be determined by MCC UP recommendations, allocated resources, and implementation timelines.

Access Studio

Access Studio workshops are designed for individuals with disabilities, tailored to their specific needs. Offered on the third Saturday of each month, these workshops combine in-gallery experiences with studio-based projects. To date, the Gardner Museum partnered with artist Takiyah Harris to offer three Access Studio workshops in partnership with Horace Mann School for the Deaf.

Visual Descriptions for Collection Objects & Exhibition Images

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. In the last fiscal year, 370 visual descriptions have been added to the collection database online.

Visual descriptions of many of the objects on view in special exhibitions are offered in online Gallery Guides.

Over **100**
visual descriptions of
artworks in exhibition
Gallery Guides online

Touch Tours

The Gardner Museum's Conservation and Education staff trained 13 Museum Teachers to lead Touch Tours, which are private group tours for visitors who are blind or have low vision. These tours allow visitors to enjoy a tactile experience of the museum, safely handling collection objects and Courtyard plants under supervision of the staff, and, since April of this year, the pilot program has already served 28 participants.

"I was the sighted guide for my daughter as she is a person who is blind since birth...I just had to write to you to commend Melissa, our tour guide...Her knowledge, kindness, and understanding were present throughout our tour. We are so grateful to her for making our trip so lovely."

- Tour participant, May 2022

MUSEUM LEADERSHIP & GOVERNANCE

Advancing our institutional governance to reflect the diversity we are seeking, we 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:

- We have committed to yearly Board recruiting goals that uphold DEAI aspirations. In FY22, three new Trustees joined the Board, all of whom identify as women and/or people of color. The current composition of the Board is 41% identifying as BIPOC or AAPI.
- The Board of Trustees took part in a facilitated dialogue on the exhibition *Being Muholi: Portraits as Resistance* exploring themes of Blackness and queerness and receive, as a matter of best practice, all available training materials for the Museum's seasonal exhibitions. This year's resources included FAQ documents and presentations, from training on topics of sexuality and gender to exhibition overviews with curators and Museum leadership.

TOWARD A DIVERSE WORKFORCE AND EQUITABLE WORKPLACE VALUES

The Gardner Museum is committed to inclusive hiring practices to ensure that our staff reflects the diversity of our community. We continue to work to eliminate bias in our job posts, recruitment, and onboarding, diversify our applicant pools, and support a more diverse workforce. As of the publication of this report, the demographics of the Gardner Museum staff, all positions, is 20% BIPOC and AAPI, up from 16% the year prior.

Gardner Ambassador Program

The Gardner Museum Ambassador program offers paid internship opportunities in partnership with Bunker Hill Community College. The program has a dual focus on departmental training and visitor experience, with the goal of building a visitor-centered, diverse workforce for art museums of the future. This year, the Gardner Museum Ambassadors shared their perspectives on improving access to and the quality of internships and apprenticeships in the museum field. We are pleased to announce that three recent Gardner Museum Ambassadors were hired to full-time positions in the Collections, Development, and Finance departments.

DEPARTMENTAL DEAI WORK HIGHLIGHTS

Every department at the Gardner Museum 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. In addition to projects listed above, Gardner Museum staff worked on the following:

- The Finance Department continues to work on supplier diversity.
- The IT Department has been implementing ADA accessibility improvements on the website.
- The Security Department focused on ongoing training on DEAI themes in support of their interactions with visitors.
- Gift at the Gardner Museum supports small businesses, particularly those owned by people of color and those in the LGBTQIA+ community, and is an accessible retail space, including with its pricing strategy.
- The Horticulture Department has been creating ethnobotanical snapshots of the Museum's living collection, exploring the native habitats and global distribution of its plants and their relationships to humans now and in the past.
- The Curator of Landscape convened a program entitled *The Larger Landscape Conversation: Black Landscapes Matter* which explored racial inequities that impact the development and use of the built environment.
- The Collections and Archives Department worked to expand knowledge of the diversity of the Gardner Museum collection and to share learnings on the *Inside the Collection* blog. The team continues to work on research into the Japanese and Islamic art collection, with the support of consulting curators.
- The Education Department continued to test assessment tools for the upcoming evaluation project for Thinking Through Art to ensure that students with disabilities and English learners can fully demonstrate the breadth and depth of their critical thinking and social-emotional skills.