



ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, ACCESSIBILITY
& INCLUSION (DEAI) UPDATE

DECEMBER 2022





DEAI COMMITMENTS

The Gardner is an inclusive museum that welcomes everyone. 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 the Gardner's strategic plan. In 2020, the Museum established both board and staff teams to focus on the ways we manifest this commitment throughout the institution. Trustees and staff are deeply engaged in this work; in the authentic, ongoing expression of inclusive values and expanded perspectives; in the embrace of community voices and marginalized stories; and in gratitude for our audiences' participation and feedback. This report is intended to acknowledge progress while recognizing continued opportunities for improvement.

It includes highlights from the first half of fiscal year 2023 (July through December of 2022), and represents the ongoing integration of DEAI into the fabric of our organizational culture.

MUSEUM RE-ACCREDITATION

Accreditation by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) is the museum field's mark of distinction, providing validation of a museum's operations and impact. Every 10 years, an accredited museum will undergo a rigorous process of self-assessment and peer review to ensure it meets the National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums and to determine if it is achieving its stated mission and goals. In November 2022, following a 10-month review, the Gardner was awarded AAM reaccreditation.

The resulting report states:

Using its stellar collection as a springboard, the [strategic] plan strives to preserve and bring its extensive holdings to life, to create innovative exhibitions and programming conceptualized and carried out by many, diverse voices, and to address the difficult social, political, and cultural issues of our complicated times. The museum is fully committed to DEAI principles. And its embrace of multiple perspectives and healthy, authentic respect for differing viewpoints has made the Gardner a leader in the museum field.

RESEARCH AND LEARNING

The Gardner is committed to ongoing research about our collection, including our living horticulture collection, our founder, and our material and historical legacy. We are committed to the exploration of complex histories and to uncovering their relevance to the equally complex present.

- The Museum released Isabella Stewart Gardner: A Life. Separating fiction and fact, and responding to some of the public's most frequently asked questions, this biography—the first produced by the Museum in nearly a century—paints a picture of Isabella's life as one of contradictions, a balance of opinions and outlooks that were progressive and, at times, shockingly conservative. The book covers a wide range of topics including the sources of her family wealth and her engagement with the political and social issues of her time.
- As part of The Larger Landscape Conversation series, the Curator of Landscape has studied contemporary literature on disability and design with particular focus on the design of the built environment, public realm, and cultural institutions. Suggesting that we must think beyond access and “ableist” perspectives alone in favor of more diverse and inclusive understandings of ability, today's advocates argue for representation

ASIAN ART ACCESS PROJECT

The Museum is working to improve access to its over 1,000 works of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indian, and Persian art. Using a phased approach, this project focuses on in-gallery access to collection objects to improve visitors' ability to view and appreciate these important works, as well treatment, rehousing, the creation of reproductions to support rotation of delicate original objects, improved lighting, and scholarly research. In the first half of the year, the Curatorial and Collections teams began conservation work on the Japanese lacquer panels and other works, and reinstalled Chinese painted scrolls and Japanese screens. We are grateful to the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation for their support of this project.

of diverse abilities in cultural production, including in spaces where only “ideal” bodies were previously represented. This research will initially inform the program The Larger Landscape Conversation: The Design of Disability on March 9, 2023, and then will be shared with the Museum’s Accessibility team for further discussion.

- The Conservation team is learning more about how careful examination of object materials and manufacture can help us to identify country or culture of origin. The team has learned how other museums are tackling the study and presentation of objects from Africa, Asia, and Indigenous communities. Their research and findings are shared in the Inside the Collections blog, exhibition labels and catalogs, and in the online collections database.
- The Horticulture department continues its ethnobotanical research into the living collection. Ethnobotanical study honors the relationship between plants and people, exploring the traditional knowledge held by a people in that plant’s place of origin, past and present. The team is learning the ways that their movement of plants through various growing spaces (indoor/outdoor, shade/sun, warm/cool) mimics the plants’ native habitats, such as the movement of cymbidiums down hill under shade in the late summer to mimic the cool nights in the Himalayan foothills. This approach to growing and cultivation in the greenhouses brings deeper understanding to the living collection’s seasonal rhythms and the meaning of sustainability. Completed ethnobotanical snapshots are shared in the Inside the Collection blog.

EXPANDING ACCESS AND REACH

- In the first half of the year, the Museum raised new funds in support of the Strategic Plan’s vision for increased free access for the community. New institutional funding was provided by the Wallace Minot Leonard Foundation. Advisors have also launched an endowed Fund for Access with two initial gifts to seed the fund and a goal of raising \$500,000 to support free and discounted admission for the long-term future.
- The Museum launched its updated Museum Pass (or Library) Program (MPP) in November. The new program offers local libraries, including Boston Public Library network members, and the communities they serve greater flexibility and improved access to the Museum. Local libraries may select from tiered membership levels that provide flex passes that can be used on any day we are open. The new membership prices better align with our current admission fees and the switch to a digital platform reduces production costs and paper waste.
- This year, we began a first-of-its-kind study to determine how well the Thinking Through Art year-long professional development program and classroom instructional materials support the strategic initiatives of the Boston Public Schools both to offer

more culturally responsive and equitable instruction and to see gains in critical thinking and social emotional learning among students at all grade levels. If the study finds that Thinking Through Art achieves these goals, the program would present a model for how student outcomes can be improved through thoughtful cooperation between cultural institutions and public schools.

EXHIBITIONS, PROGRAMS & COLLABORATIONS

- In October, the Music department presented the world premiere of Requiem for the Enslaved as part of the annual Weekend Concert Series. With music by Carlos Simon and text by Marco Pave, Requiem for the Enslaved commemorates the stories of 272 enslaved men, women, and children sold in 1838 by Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.. Simon's original compositions incorporate African American spirituals and Catholic melodies, are structured as a liturgical mass for the dead, and have been described as a sermon and as the sound of restorative justice.
- In a suite of three exhibitions, this past season featured selections from contemporary artist Titus Kaphar's powerful portrait series, The Jerome Project. A reflection on the impact of mass incarceration on communities, particularly people of color, these paintings consider the inequities in American society and provide a platform for audiences to reflect deeply on whose lived experiences we consider, whose we forget, and whose we erase. Incorporated into academic curricula at three local colleges, the exhibition was supported by a public program on mass incarceration, creativity, and healing featuring award-winning poet, lawyer, and author Reginald Dwayne Betts, Stacey Borden of New Beginnings Reentry Services, Erika Rumbley of the New Garden Society, and André de Quadros of the Prison Arts Project at Boston University. The program was attended by the loved ones of currently incarcerated Bostonians, activists working on reentry, and many more. Audience members were encouraged to donate new and lightly used books to the Prison Book Program.

MUSEUM LEADERSHIP & GOVERNANCE

The Board of Trustees and Board of Advisors embrace a vision of inclusion that supports all forms of diversity, and are committed to creating a culture driven by shared DEAI values. Museum leadership continues to establish and build relationships with candidates for its Board of Trustees and Board of Advisors, aiming to diversify these groups authentically and respectfully over time. Currently 41% of the Board of Trustees identifies as BIPOC.

In November of 2022, Trustees, Life Trustees, Advisors, and a cross-departmental cohort of Museum staff gathered to review the progress of the 2019-2024 Strategic Plan. Presentations and discussions were centered on the Museum's core values, including its DEAI commitments. The group heard presentations by Lee Pelton, President of The Boston Foundation, on the state of the cultural sector in Boston and the role of leadership in cultural communities; and Porsha Olayiwola, City of Boston Poet Laureate and Gardner Artist-in-Residence, and Veronica Robles, celebrated musician, community organizer, and Gardner Neighborhood Salon Luminary, on their experiences collaborating with the Museum and how the Museum can better advance its work in the community.

GREEN RIBBON COMMISSION CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS WORKING GROUP

Under the direction of the Chief Operating Officer and the Director of Facilities, the Gardner Museum is one of only 40 cultural institution members of the Boston Green Ribbon Commission, launched by the City in 2010 to accelerate the implementation of the City's Climate Action Plan (CAP). Planning for a climate-impacted future, this GRC working group includes civic and cultural organization leaders who aim to raise awareness of climate issues, discuss approaches to climate resilience and carbon mitigation, and weigh in on policy directions.

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. As of the publication of this report, the demographics of the Gardner Museum staff, all positions, is 24% BIPOC, up from 20% at the end of the fiscal year prior. The Museum has invested in new recruitment tools to diversify its applicant pool. With access to more than 25,000 online job boards, the Museum can better reach candidates outside of the museum sector, helping reduce hiring bias, and tapping into professional networks representing talent with more diverse lived experiences.

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 a comprehensive understanding of the Museum's overall DEAI strategy. In addition to projects listed above, Gardner Museum staff worked on the following:

- Toured local exhibitions and attended virtual trainings with peer organizations to diversify our learning and grow our cultural and industry competence
- Took steps to improve sustainability in exhibition design
- Worked toward greater supplier diversity, to supporting businesses owned by minority groups, those with a transparent supply chain that stimulates local economies, and those who are eco-conscious and sustainability-focused
- Continued to improve website accessibility
- Continued progress on the gallery lighting project which, in addition to its climate benefits, enhance the viewer's appreciation of the collection, making objects more accessible to those with low vision and achieving a new standard for viewing that is unprecedented in the Museum's history