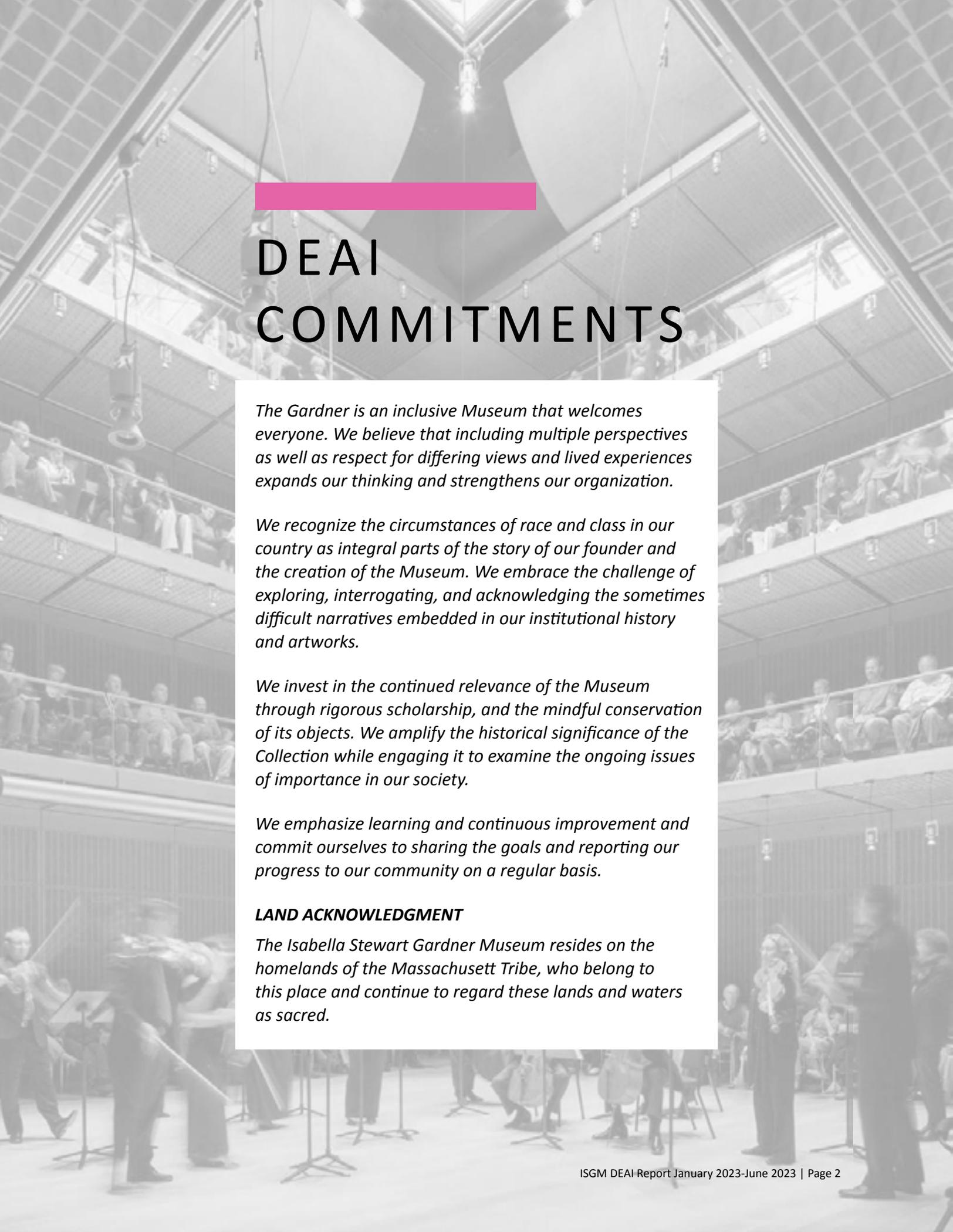


# ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, ACCESSIBILITY  
& INCLUSION (DEAI) UPDATE

JUNE 2023





# 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 second half of fiscal year 2023 (January through June of 2023), and represents the ongoing integration of DEAI into the fabric of our organizational culture.

## RESEARCH AND LEARNING

The Gardner is committed to ongoing research about our Collection, including our living plant collection, our founder, and our material and historical legacy—and to sharing that with our visitors. We seek to explore the complex histories and to uncover their relevance to the equally complex present. Given the overall Eurocentric nature of the Collection, non-Western objects have historically been understudied and these efforts seek to redress that knowledge gap and bring new insights to the public.

- The Museum released two publications to accompany the winter exhibitions: *Betye Saar: Heart of a Wanderer* and *Fellow Wanderer: Isabella's Travel Albums*. In the second publication, author Dr. Diana Seave Greenwald, *William and Lia Poorvu Curator of the Collection*, and collaborators examined the beliefs and assumptions that Isabella brought to her travels as a wealthy white woman during the Gilded Age. The book, like the exhibition in the Fenway, expanded the view to global influences on the Museum beyond Venice, and brought new research addressing some of the images found in the travel albums. As part of this exhibition suite, the staff participated in a Zoom training by Constance Chen, Ph.D. on "Collecting Culture: American Travelers and Gilded Age Orientalism."
- The Conservation team, along with Collections and Registration, is expanding work on the non-Western pieces in the permanent Collection to include Egyptian and Persian objects. They hosted curatorial and scholarly visits which included analysis of a [bronze](#)

[Egyptian sculpture of Harpocrates](#) and a [Syrian Fragment of a Mosque Lamp](#). The Asian Art Access Project continued its work, resulting in the reinstallation of a [Bengali textile Wall Hanging: Triumphal Arch](#), and a new learning about one of our [Chinese Scroll paintings, Pheasants](#), which had been cut down and framed in the 1960s. Through pigment analysis, in-depth examinations and discussions around mounting, they concluded that the piece is to return to a more appropriate, full scroll mount.

- The Collections team worked to share with our visitors and scholars new research and conservation efforts on topics and objects of historically underrepresented groups, cultures, and geographies. Website commentaries provide context beyond basic catalog information. In the past two quarters the team published 12 web commentaries that supported blog posts about Isabella’s travel albums such as [Isabella’s 1883 trip to Japan](#), the [exoticizing of Spain in the 19th century](#), and the [production of the facsimile of the Travel Album: Spain and Portugal](#). The *Inside the Collection* blog reflects the Museum’s DEAI goals through expanded topics and by commissioning BIPOC. Recent blogs include: a focus on the Museum’s East Asian art with the [Chinese Scroll paintings](#); a different perspective on motherhood with [the complexities of Mother’s Day](#); [Betye Saar’s relationship with the Museum](#); and Isabella’s relationships with BIPOC, specifically [Black tenor Roland Hayes](#), who performed at the Museum. The team continues its initiative committed to creating visual descriptions to be used by screen readers for visually impaired visitors to the website, writing 469 visual descriptions for objects and paintings.
- The Horticulture team continues to engage our visitors more deeply in the plant materials in the Courtyard by researching and writing ethnobotanical snapshots of species in the Museum’s living plant collection including [Cymbidium](#), [Agapanthus](#), and tree ferns. We seek to expand our understanding of the living plant collection beyond ties to Isabella’s personal collecting, growing practices and aesthetics to a broader view of the plants’ roles in their native ecosystems (from habitat to medicine and beyond). The presence of many of these species in the living plant collection is a legacy of colonial plant hunters who gathered plants across the globe to bring them to Europe and eventually Boston. This new research informs plant care, courtyard designs, blog posts, ambassador seminars, and horticulture-themed tours.

## EXPANDING ACCESS AND REACH

- The IT department has worked to make a number of accessibility updates to the Gardner’s public website at [www.gardnermuseum.org](http://www.gardnermuseum.org) and has significantly improved the experience for those individuals using screen readers and other assistive tools when visiting our website.
- This spring the Museum continued its Access Studio program, an initiative to increase

opportunities for individuals with disabilities to engage with the Museum's facilitated programming. Access Studio sessions pair exploration in the galleries with artist-led art-making and experimentation in the Studio. By partnering with teaching artists who themselves have disabilities, this work brings first-hand perspective and knowledge into all stages of planning and implementation. The Museum was proud to partner with the Perkins School for the Blind to welcome participants for these sessions.

- The Horticulture team collaborated with our Gardner Ambassadors and colleagues in Education to provide an easily accessible, on-site resource to answer the public's curiosity and most common plant identification questions. We're working to create and maintain a textual and visual plant inventory for each week's courtyard installation. This simple intervention mitigates cultural assumptions around which plants are native to landscapes across the globe.
- Under 30 membership: Over the past two quarters, our Under 30 membership level (aimed at engaging with the strategic growth audience of people aged 18-30) grew to nearly 900 members. The first Under 30 member event was held to great success. Nearly 75 people attended, visited together, and made art at an event created by a cross-department team.

## GARDNER AMBASSADORS

The Museum's [Gardner Ambassadors internship program](#) has created accessible entry points into museum professions for 40 community college students since its inception in 2020. We offer paid internships to students from communities historically underrepresented in museum professions, building a diverse workforce for the Gardner and the field. Three quarters of Ambassadors identify as BIPOC, including 4 of the 9 interns from Bunker Hill Community College who participated during the 2022-23 academic year. Ambassadors develop transferable professional skills through a dual focus on departmental training and visitor experience. More than half go on to coursework or jobs in museums and/or the arts, including 11 former Ambassadors who have been hired by the Gardner Museum. To expand access to the Ambassador program, this spring we engaged a new partner, the University of Massachusetts Boston, to launch a new summer Ambassador session from May to July 2023.

## EXHIBITIONS, PROGRAMS & COLLABORATIONS

- One of the many programs we offered to our visitors over the past six months was a collaboration with our Education and Public Programs Department entitled *Canon/Canyon/Cannon*. At the start of 2023 we launched this new poetry and performance series curated by and co-hosted by Luminary alum, Artist-In-Residence, and *Boston Poet Laureate* Porsha Olayiwola. The events invited performers and visitors to consider questions of influence and to find new meaning through language and performance. The series takes inspiration from Isabella Stewart Gardner’s convention-breaking decision to omit texts on the walls of her Museum, and seeks, with each reading, to eradicate the rules defining “publishable” and “performance” poetry.
- [The Theater Offensive](#) is the Gardner Museum’s first community organization in residence. The partnership is funded by the Barr Foundation. Together our two organizations seek to build a learning community in which we share our distinct approaches and develop mutual goals, exploring ways in which we can become sites of belonging for transgender and queer communities. From January through June 2023, core teams from The Theater Offensive and the Gardner met to share institutional histories, priorities, and ways of working. These teams planned two summer roundtables with trans and queer cultural leaders that will support interpretation and programs related to the Museum’s upcoming exhibition, *On Christopher Street*.
- In an ongoing effort to invite our visitors to experience a broad range of offerings, the Music department’s Spring 2023 season featured works by composers of color or women composers at over 80% of our performances. We welcomed back Boston Children’s Chorus for their “Stay Out for Freedom” concert in which the singers “call for educational equity and speak from personal experience about barriers in the local education system.” The Sphinx Virtuosi also returned to the Gardner with a program highlighting the artistic excellence of young Black and Latinx musicians. Outside of the concert series, the Music department continues to prioritize music of marginalized communities, particularly local artists in the greater Boston area. In that vein, in collaboration with the Museum’s Development department, we were thrilled to invite Zaira Meneses’ all women Son Jarocho band for the Museum’s Velvet Party as well as Veronica Robles’ all women Mariachi band for the annual Gala.

## MUSEUM LEADERSHIP & GOVERNANCE

The Board of Trustees and its 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 Trustee and Board of Advisors, aiming to diversify these groups authentically and respectfully over time. Currently 42% of the Board of Trustees identifies as BIPOC.

## **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 Human Resources staff activated the “preferred pronouns” module in the Museum’s employment system allowing staff to choose their preferred pronouns for HR-related database purposes. Hearing aid coverage for all participants was added to the Museum’s health plan offerings, and Human Resources staff created and shared a “Mental Health Resources” guide, which lists physical health, mental health, financial wellness, crisis support, and peer network resources for people of different social and racial identities.

## **DEAI TASK FORCE OF THE BOARD AND DEAI WORKING GROUP OF THE STAFF**

In the last six months, the DEAI Working Group of the Staff refreshed its charter and updated its membership, which consists of 9 members from 8 different departments of the Museum. Membership is diverse by race and ethnicity, age and generation, gender, sexual orientation, ability and disability, and brings together representatives from different levels within the Museum’s organization. One new initiative of the Working Group is a program called “DEAI Breakfast Bites,” which brings the staff together four times a year to learn about a current DEAI department-specific initiative and offers time for discussion and cross-departmental learning. The DEAI Task Force of the Board also refreshed its charter and made updates to its membership composition at the end of the 2023 fiscal year.

## 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:

- The staff of the Development department successfully fundraised for many relevant initiatives including the Strategic Plan's free access goals. The Events team continued its engagement with diverse vendors for the Gala, patron celebrations, rentals, and exhibition openings, which included diverse, local musicians for all events. Additionally, Joe Malaika, a local fashion leader originally from South Africa created the "fashion feature" for the Museum's Velvet Party. The Corporate team cultivated relationships with women and Black-owned businesses by inviting founders and staff to public programs, private events, and other Museum activities aligning with their interests.
- The Finance department has worked to design a new system to track vendor diversity data.
- The staff of Gift at the Gardner, the Museum's gift shop, began new partnerships with vendors that are local, owned and operated by people who represent diversity, or that donate profits to charities supporting diverse communities, and/or that use sustainable or fair trade manufacturing practices.