



ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, ACCESSIBILITY &
INCLUSION (DEAI) UPDATE

DECEMBER 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 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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 2024 (July through December 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. These efforts seek to redress that knowledge gap and bring new insights to the public.

- In Contemporary, exhibition planning is underway for Haitian visual artist Fabiola Jean-Louis's upcoming exhibition slated for FY25, for which the department has been engaging in reading and research about Haitian culture. This exhibition will welcome visitors to explore issues of spirituality, resistance, memory, and more; our long-term relationship with Fabiola will help us deepen engagement with the Haitian American population in Boston. Contemporary has hired Carl Damas, who is of Haitian heritage, as the architect of record for Fabiola Jean-Louis's upcoming exhibition (February 2025). The department has watched the relationship between the two Haitian creatives flourish.
- In an effort to examine other exhibitions that endeavor to make the past present as well as learn more about the context of Mrs. Gardner's life, Collections team members visited the exhibition [Objects of Addiction: Opium, Empire, and the Chinese Art Trade](#) at the Harvard Art Museums, met with Sarah Laursen, *Alan J. Dworsky Curator of Chinese Art* to learn about the process for creating the show, and had a team discussion afterwards. The department learned about Boston families' involvement in the opium trade (many during Gardner's time), how many objects in Boston collections are connected to that, and how the curators and educators connected that involvement in the opium trade to the contemporary issue of the opioid crisis today.

- Conservation staff supported many cross-department DEAI initiatives. One major area continues to be the examination and analysis of objects, along with visiting scholars and the Collections team, and includes the [Black Glass Madonna](#), the [Spanish Cloister Cross](#) (reattributed from an Italian to a Palestinian workshop), the [Altar of Saint Maurice and the Theban Legion](#) (to determine if the Saint was originally depicted as Black), and, notably, the [Chinese black mirror glaze Vase](#) from the Yellow Room. The vase was previously thought to be covered in a plain black glaze, but upon closer inspection, it was found to have a landscape decoration. New photography by Amanda Guerra, Collections Photographer, reveals the once invisible decoration, and a blog post about the vase was co-authored by Gabrielle Niu, Assistant Curator of the Collection, and Jessica Chloros, Objects Conservator. We continue to find that the deep dive into researching individual collection objects is invaluable to providing a better understanding of the diversity of our collection. As always, cross-department collaboration is key to all of our work.

EXPANDING ACCESS AND REACH

- Development will work to complete the \$30M Endowment Goal for the Renewing the Promise Fundraising Campaign in support of the Strategic Plan and its core values. July 2023 began the final year of the Renewing the Promise campaign. The department reached the campaign's two current use goals in FY23, raising \$21M in unrestricted operating and \$14M in restricted operating from 2020-2024.
 - \$1M raised for the Artist-in-Residence program for a total of \$1.25M raised in endowment funds during this campaign.
 - Continued fundraising for the Board of Advisors 2022 Fund for Access. The endowed fund, with a minimum goal of \$500,000, will support the Strategic Plan's initiative to support increased free access to the Museum.
- Education offered a broad slate of public programs for our visitors this season. Free First Thursdays programming included live music, DJ performances, tours and spotlight talks, artmaking, workshops, and other experiential activities featuring diverse local artists. In October, we collaborated with Luminary and birth and bereavement doula Luana Morales to organize programs in honor of Infant and Pregnancy Loss Awareness Month, exploring connections with local advocates, healers, and Isabella's own story. In November and December, programming in collaboration with Luminaries Liza Zayas and Keith Mascoll celebrated freedom of expression and Sneaker Culture, connecting exhibition themes with stories of mental health, creativity and healing. Art and fashion as tools of self expression, especially for artists and people of color, were topics of discussion in the Larger Conversation with Horace Ballard, Fabiola Jean-Louis, and Carla Fernández moderated by theo tyson. These same themes inspired the December *Canon, Canyon, Cannon* reading featuring Imani Davis, Chrysanthemum, Jarvis Subia, and Danez Smith, hosted and curated by Porsha Olayiwola with DJ WhySham.

We honored Indigenous Peoples' Day this fall with programming on the actual day, in the Studio throughout the month of October with an activity designed by multidisciplinary artist Erin Genia (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate), and in the Larger Landscape Conversation on reparations and land back with community leader Elizabeth Solomon (Massachusetts), scholar Ghazal Jafari, and Afro Indigenous activist Amber Starks, hosted and moderated by Charles Waldheim. Access Studio programs continued to provide welcoming and inclusive Museum experiences designed by artists with disabilities for individuals with disabilities. We held three Access Studio workshops, led by teaching artist Taki Harris, offering facilitated in-gallery exploration and close looking followed by experimentation and discovery in the Education Studio.

GIFT AT THE GARDNER

Gift at the Gardner aims to amplify businesses owned by historically excluded groups, are locally owned and/or fair trade, utilize sustainable production practices, and fiscally support DEAI-focused initiatives/charities. Above all else, the gift shop aims to move away—when possible—from overseas mass-produced goods with ambiguous or unknown production practices. Gift at the Gardner hopes to work with at least 10 new vendors that align with these core values.

In addition to maintaining a core range of products that align to these values, in the first half year the gift shop has introduced 11 new vendors to our product assortment of these: All are women-owned (two are co-owned by a woman and a man); five identify as BIPOC-owned; all are either independent small-batch makers (4) or utilize ethical/fair trade production practices (7); five are sustainability-focused; four donate profits to charities supporting the environment or underprivileged groups; and two produced fully custom ISGM-branded products with us. One of these vendors is Boutique by Mariam, which created our bags and boxes inspired by Isabella's opera coat.

EXHIBITIONS, PROGRAMS & COLLABORATIONS

- Peggy Fogelman, *Norma Jean Calderwood Director*, prepared for the January 2024 opening of the exhibition of *Steve McQueen's Lynching Tree* with co-curator Lee Pelton, CEO of The Boston Foundation, by engaging leaders of the Black community in the interpretation of the work, planning the panel conversation, engaging the ISGM Board in discussions of this country's history of slavery and the importance of memory and repair, and planning community viewings during non-public hours, among other things.

- Fabiola Jean-Louis's *Rewriting History* exhibition was presented in the Museum's Fenway Gallery this fall and featured the work of our Artist-in-Residence, Fabiola Jean-Louis, a Haitian maker working in photography, paper textile design, and sculpture. One of her high-styled period dresses made of paper and resembling garments worn by European female nobility from the 1600s to 1800s was accompanied by lush photographs of women of color wearing the beautiful yet cage-like paper creations. Through the creation of these garments and dressing women of color in them, Jean-Louis reclaims the power and place of Black women so often portrayed not in elegant dress, but in attire of the impoverished or enslaved. Her dresses and photographs serve as a corrective to a depiction of history in which Black women are often presented as the victim or disenfranchised.
- Fabiola Jean-Louis also joined artist Carla Fernández and art historian Horace Ballard in conversation to unpack exhibition themes of self-expression, identity, and appropriation in a panel discussion moderated by Theo Tyson, *Penny Vinik Curator of Fashion Arts* at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, that welcomed local artists, community members, students, and members of the public and Museum. *Canon, Canyon, Cannon: Well Dressed* celebrated the elegance, exuberance, and art of self-expression during a special evening of poetry and performance curated by Porsha Olayiwola and inspired by the Museum's fall exhibitions *Fabiola Jean-Louis: Rewriting History*, *Inventing Isabella*, and Carla Fernández's newly commissioned work for the Anne H. Fitzpatrick Façade, *Tradition is not Static*, highlighting indigenous Mexican culture. Featured performers include acclaimed poet Danez Smith.
- Contemporary worked with the Berklee College of Music and pianist Jason Moran to involve students from a variety of backgrounds in participating in Rashid Johnson's *Antoine's Organ* exhibited during the run of *Presence of Plants*.
- The Museum in partnership with The Theater Offensive, the Gardner Museum's first community organization in residence funded by the Barr Foundation, hosted two roundtables in July and August with trans and queer cultural leaders. The intent of these conversations was to support interpretation and programs related to the upcoming exhibition *On Christopher Street: Transgender Portraits* by Mark Seliger opening in June 2024. The result was the decision to add a new exhibition in the Fenway Gallery featuring Boston-area LGBTQIA+ photographers. The group exhibition, *Portraits from Boston, With Love*, will feature portrait photography by Olivia Slaughter, Jaypix Belmer, and Ally Schmaling.
- The Summer Gardner Ambassador program had a successful pilot from May to July 2023 with eight students from UMass Boston College of Liberal Arts placed in our Contemporary, Development, Education, Music, and Operations departments. The Academic Year Ambassadors from Bunker Hill Community College started in October 2023, with six students in the Conservation, Contemporary, Development, Education, Human Resources, and Music departments.
- Fall public programs included *The Larger Landscape Conversation: Whose Land?* discussing the role of landscape architecture and urban planning in relation to the acknowledgment, reparation, and return of land taken from Indigenous peoples featuring speakers Elizabeth Solomon (Massachusetts), Ambers Starks (Creek), and Ghazal Jafari, moderated by Charles Waldheim. *Indigenous Peoples' Day* featured a

land acknowledgment by member of the Massachusetts Tribe at Ponkapoag Elizabeth Solomon, art-making by local Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate artist, educator, and Polly Thayer Starr Visiting Studio Artist Erin Genia, and performances and a panel conversation led by Taíno Afroborikua award-winning choreographer Mar Parrilla.

MUSIC PROGRAM

Music completed another successful season of concerts, the programming for which is a direct result of our DEAI goals. The department presented several overlooked women composers from a variety of backgrounds, both past and present, including Dora Pejacevic, Kaija Saariaho, Cheryl Frances-Hoad, Reena Esmail, Grazyna Bacewicz, and Tonia Ko. British cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason (the first Black musician to win the BBC Young Music of the Year award) performed in November, and we were thrilled to be able to offer free tickets to students, staff, and teaching artists of [Project STEP \(String Training Education Program\)](#), a New England-based organization providing comprehensive music education to children from historically underrepresented groups in classical music. The department is once again reaffirmed in its mission to pursue diversified concert programming, and learned that the rekindling of the relationship with Project STEP is a huge move forward in our mission to engage local audiences in a meaningful way—and to position the Gardner as an important ally in this mission.

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.

TOWARD A DIVERSE WORKFORCE AND EQUITABLE WORKPLACE VALUES

The Isabella Stewart 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 28% BIPOC, up from 24% at the end of the fiscal year prior.

The Human Resources staff, in collaboration with the DEAI Working Group of the Staff, reviewed the Museum's *Employee Handbook* updating it with gender-inclusive language.