



Diversity, Equity, Accessibility & Inclusion Report

July – December 2024

ISABELLA
STEWART GARDNER
MUSEUM

©Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, MA
Photo by David Perez Pictures.

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.

Isabella Stewart Gardner established the Museum “for the education and enjoyment of the public forever” as an act of civic leadership. She involved herself in many social causes, partnering with community organizers and supporting women’s education, for example. In carrying her legacy into the 21st century, we aspire to make our collections, exhibitions, and programs accessible and welcoming to the broadest possible audience, bringing people together for personal enjoyment and connection.

We value Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion as drivers of staff empowerment, innovation, and institutional excellence. We embrace the complex stories embedded in our history and artworks as we work together to reflect and advance these core values.

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 2025 (July through December of 2024), and represents the ongoing integration of DEAI into the fabric of our organizational culture.

RESEARCH AND LEARNING

The Gardner remains committed to conducting 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 uncover their relevance to the equally complex present. Given the overall Eurocentric focus 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.

COLLECTIONS

In an effort to acknowledge, unite, and engage with diverse communities through shared customs and traditions, the Collections department organized a visit to Chinatown led by the Asian Community Development Corporation (ACDC). They viewed the exhibition *The Inventive Brush* at Pao Arts Center, which explored the tradition of contemporary calligraphy in East Asian cultures. They also arranged a visit to an exhibition at Historic New England property the Eustis Estate titled *The Importance of Being Furnished*. It explored the intersection of queer identity and interior design in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

CONTEMPORARY ART

In the fall of 2024, the exhibition [*Mary Ellen Mark: A Seattle Family*](#) explored themes of teen homelessness, pregnancy, and addiction with an empathic approach. Public Viewings of the film [*Tiny: The Life of Erin Blackwell*](#) stimulated impactful, self-led audience discussions.

Our 2024 Artists-in-Residence were Taiwanese interdisciplinary artist Yu-Wen Wu and Haitian choreographer Jean Appolon, accompanied by his dance organization Jean Appolon Expressions (JAE). Yu-Wen Wu was wrapping up the second half of her residency and Jean Appolon began his tenure in the fall.

The Contemporary Art department also developed Haitian artist Fabiola Jean-Louis's forthcoming exhibition, [*Waters of the Abyss: An Intersection of Spirit and Freedom*](#), and a corresponding catalog. This is the first book on Jean-Louis's work and includes an essay by Haitian writer and 1999 Artist-in-Residence [*Edwidge Danticat*](#). They also collaborated with the Interpretation team to include Haitian translations of Fabiola's quotes in the exhibition space.

CONSERVATION

The Conservation staff supported the preparation and treatment of works for the [*Fabiola Jean-Louis*](#) and Black Boston artist [*Allan Rohan Crite*](#) exhibitions. In preparation for the Crite exhibition, Conservation staff are continuing to treat several of Crite's works belonging to collections throughout Boston. This marks an unprecedented collaboration between the Museum's Conservation department and our city's arts institutions.

The Museum concluded its interdepartmental project to reinstall works of Asian art in the First Floor Elevator Hall in December 2024. These three Japanese sliding doors (*sugito*) depict [*Kirin Under a Pine Branch*](#), [*Two Cranes*](#), and [*Xiezhi and Bamboo*](#). The multi-year project included the installation of a new case, conservation treatment on two of the doors, and new interpretive panels explaining the history of collecting and display of Asian art within the Museum. These doors were originally located in the Rear Hall and Stairway, as seen in photos of the space from the early 1970s. They were later removed to allow for temporary exhibition space, and ultimately to allow for the construction of new bathrooms during the new building project (c. 2010).

EXPANDING ACCESS AND REACH

DEVELOPMENT

The Development department secured funding from four foundations for access-related projects. The grants currently support the growth and development of accessibility initiatives.

The Development department maintained the Museum's designation as a Universal Participation organization by the Mass Cultural Council, for fully embracing accessibility systems and ideals, offering continual training on diversity services, working with experts when addressing accessibility, and cultivating a culture of risk and innovation. As a requirement, the Museum conducts organizationwide accessibility self-assessments, which will shed light on the Museum's accessibility efforts within the areas of organizational approach, physical space, access services, communication, and programming.

EDUCATION

The Education department researched and tested approaches to multilingual interpretation and communication in exhibitions that serve language access, further cultivating a culture of belonging for our audiences. During an Access Studio session, the Museum welcomed students from the Perkins School for the Blind for an accessible inquiry-based tour and studio art activity. This activity was inspired by the Touch Tour, a unique multisensory opportunity for visually impaired visitors to experience key sculptures and plants in the Collections through touch, co-conducted by Museum teachers and Horticulture staff.

Education staff delivered a wide-ranging slate of public programs for our visitors. Free First Thursdays included live music, workshops, tours, art-making, and other activities that featured diverse local artists such as The Theater Offensive's Queer (Re)Public Resident Artists Annalise Guidry and Victoria Awkward, Gardner Luminaries Josh Knowles and Kenny Mascary, community activist Amanda Shea, and Polly Thayer Starr Visiting Artist Daniela Rivera. They all focused on themes of family and connection.

For Indigenous Peoples Day free admission day, the Museum was joined by Elizabeth Solomon (Massachusetts at Ponkapoag) and Erin Genia (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate), who collaborated on the development of an interpretive resource to highlight a recently conserved and re-installed Tlingit basket. Tanya Nixon-Silberg and Tony Leva from Little Uprisings amplified the voices of local Indigenous artists and the theme of this year's free day: "Connection to Place."

MUSIC

The Museum completed another successful season of Sunday concerts and special programs, continuing its long-standing commitment to present performers and composers who identify as women and/or people of color. For example, the Museum welcomed Artist-in-Residence Jean Appolon and JAE to perform at the Holiday Music showcase in December. Additionally, through the Weekend Concert Series, the Music department continues to foster lasting relationships with performers and ensembles whose missions are to expand classical music audiences both locally and nationally. This includes Castle of Our Skins, Boston Children's Chorus, and Sphinx Virtuosi, to name a few.

MARKETING

The Marketing team continues to seek out vendors, graphic designers, photographers, and videographers who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) to assist with special projects. For example, the team advertised through The B-Side, a Boston-based newsletter with reach and appeal to a younger, more diverse audience. The Museum also advertised on podcasts with diverse audiences that aligned with the theme of family in [*Manet: A Model Family*](#).

To better understand the communities that the Museum engages in, the Marketing department hosted a community convening where representatives from local religious, educational, and cultural institutions were invited to come together and learn more about our initiatives including current and upcoming exhibitions. During this event, the team shared information about *Manet: A Model Family*; previewed the upcoming exhibitions by Fabiola Jean-Louis, New York-based sculptor [Ming Fay](#), and Allan Rohan Crite; and provided open time for networking. The Museum's focus was to develop new and existing relationships with invited organizations. To support this ongoing work, the Community Relations Specialist position was incorporated into the Marketing team.

EXHIBITIONS, PROGRAMS & COLLABORATIONS

The Museum continued its partnership with The Theater Offensive (TTO), the Gardner Museum's first community organization in residence, funded by the Barr Foundation. TTO and Museum staff co-created four programs, including the first drag performance at the Gardner and a collaborative summer exhibition that featured portrait photographs of community members that affirmed the multifaceted LGBTQIA+ experience. This partnership advanced the Gardner as an inclusive institution that celebrates, amplifies, and creates space for Boston's queer community voices and leaders to share their work at the museum.

The [Gardner Ambassador program](#), a paid internship offering hands-on experience in the galleries and various departments, focuses on supporting underrepresented students from Bunker Hill Community College and UMass Boston. Since its inception, the program has led to the hiring of 20 alumni into full-time, part-time, or temporary roles at the Museum. Over the summer, the Museum hosted nine UMass Boston students who gained experience in Collections, Contemporary, Development, Education, and Membership. In the fall, nine students from Bunker Hill Community College joined us, contributing to Contemporary, Development, Education, Finance, Human Resources, and Marketing.

GIFT AT THE GARDNER

Gift at the Gardner is committed to responsible purchasing practices by partnering with local businesses that prioritize fair trade practices, value ethical and sustainable sourcing, and fiscally support DEAI-focused initiatives and charities. The department continues to amplify minority-owned small businesses from underserved communities.

Between July and December of 2024, Gift at the Gardner contracted with 10 new vendors whose product assortment embodies the Museum's core values, exceeding its goal by 20%. Of these, 10 are women-owned and two identify as BIPOC-owned. Among them are sustainability-focused businesses that utilize ethical/fair trade production practices and donate profits to charities supporting the environment or underserved communities.

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, 38% of the Board of Trustees identifies as BIPOC and Asian-American Pacific Islander (AAPI).

TOWARD A DIVERSE WORKFORCE AND EQUITABLE WORKPLACE VALUES

The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum is committed to inclusive and equitable hiring practices. As of the publication of this report, the demographics of the Gardner Museum staff, all positions, is 26.6% BIPOC and AAPI, down slightly from 27.2% at the end of the prior fiscal year.