

WILLIAMS COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART

DEI Plan 2021–2023

We at the Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) are willing, resourced, and committed to the work of fostering diversity, equity, inclusion, and access at the museum, on campus, within our arts ecosystem in the Northern Berkshires, and as part of national and global efforts. Some of the points in the plan below are a continuation of existing commitments, some are new initiatives; all are borne out of our ongoing learning and focus on creating a culture of belonging together.

Quarterly review process: We will review our progress on the initiatives in this plan every three months, documenting our work as we go. We will publish a report at the end of the 2-year cycle.

Note: While each statement of commitment below has been designated a category of People, Place, or Program/Operations, per Williams College guidelines, most of the items naturally traverse all three categories. We acknowledge, therefore, the somewhat arbitrary means of organization while deeply appreciating the thought-provoking exercise of considering DEIA issues across these porous boundaries.

PEOPLE

Recruit and hire applicants of color for staff positions and seek greater diversity in museum advisory roles: The work of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility is central to every role at the museum, and a personal commitment to this work is a prerequisite for any appointment. We will work to support and retain staff members of color, connecting them to broader networks of support—on campus, in the region, and worldwide— and paying special attention to their career development and advancement opportunities. We will actively recruit applicants of color through widespread and proactive outreach, work with consultant recruiters, and strategic advertisements of job openings in media that attract diverse audiences.

We will develop a recruitment plan for diversifying our advisory groups like the Visiting Committee and Collections Council, potentially including approaches such as inviting participants from a greater scope of class years and affiliations, especially younger alumni, to join, as well as expanding the variety of opportunities for involvement with the museum for alumni and non-alumni alike in order to attract all demographics.

Establish a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Committee: In concert with the museum's strategic planning, we have formed a standing committee to actively address issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in the museum, from both a programmatic and staffing point of view. This committee named themselves Loom and has defined its **mission** as: *an advisory group within the Williams College Museum of Art that seeks to weave diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility into the individual and collective work of all WCMA staff.* Loom's self-described **vision** is: *Loom believes that integrating diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility into all aspects of our individual and collective work requires a weave of several key threads: a shared understanding of terms and their definitions; ongoing reflection of the histories and experiences that influence our perspectives and daily work; and commitment to creating a culture of openness, respect, and care. The ways in which we interact with one another must model the values that we aspire to reflect in our public-facing practice. In support of the museum's mission, Loom advocates for: regular and facilitated conversations addressing issues and questions raised by staff members; a collaborative approach to reflecting on and refining internal processes; and professional learning and development opportunities that meet evolving needs.*

Loom members represent all departments of the museum, and membership rotates over time. Once per year, members will be asked whether they would like to continue for the coming year; for those who choose or need to step off, other volunteers from the staff will have the opportunity to join Loom.

Implement increased, new, and recurring staff training: We commit to the implementation of required and repeated staff workshops in implicit bias, anti-racism, inclusion, and allyship. We will avail ourselves of the excellent resources on the Williams College campus as well as bring in talented external facilitators to help us in this work. We are resolved to continue the training around welcoming diverse audiences among all museum staff to ensure that our consistent invitation to open-ended dialogue and discovery around works of art is commensurate with the authentic, welcoming, and intentional ethos of our programming. We recognize that the work of anti-racism is a shared responsibility not restricted to public-facing staff members and that this work has vital importance to all of our relationships, both internal and external to the museum. Accordingly, we commit to making our workplace and the campus community a space where colleagues of color can truly thrive.

With the guidance and leadership of Loom members, WCMA staff will engage in this work in a way that builds momentum, facilitates understanding, encourages all voices, and fosters a culture of belonging. To this end, we commit to setting aside several professional development days annually for mandatory staff training.

Create professional development/career network: We commit to building an ever more diverse and engaged network of museum “alumni” and arts professionals who are part of the worldwide WCMA community with the following goals: supporting the careers of young professionals; fostering an increasingly diverse and welcoming museum community; and both bringing more people of color into the museum field and continuing to support their development throughout their careers. This network will be a source of support and belonging for existing staff members as well, creating a learning space where all can benefit from the experiences of others. Our Andrew W. Mellon Foundation-funded curatorial fellowship offers college graduates of color the opportunity to explore a museum career. The Mellon fellowship is one of several approaches implemented to aggregate brilliant professional candidates of color for the applicant pool.

Focus on audience research, engagement, and inclusion:

We will give special focus to improving visitor experience, in person and online, as well as dedicated efforts to be more inclusive of the Black community and other underrepresented groups. We will invest time and resources into research of our existing and potential audiences, analyze various barriers to people’s engagement with the museum, and work to eliminate these barriers. Our goal is to welcome all into the WCMA community through museum experiences, virtual engagement, and community outreach through regional partnerships.

Expand vendor diversity: We will work with a greater diversity of vendors through active solicitation of partnerships with BIPOC-owned, LGBTQ+-owned, and female-owned businesses.

PROGRAM / OPERATIONS

Acquire art by underrepresented makers: Our active collecting of work by artists of underrepresented groups, including Black artists, LGBTQ+ artists, Indigenous artists, Asian artists, Asian-American artists, and Latinx artists, with emphasis on works by women makers, will continue.

Lift up voices of underrepresented or historically marginalized scholars, artists, leaders, thinkers through programming and exhibitions: Our commitment to lifting up the voices of unheard or underheard peoples of all backgrounds is ongoing and we commit to displaying the work of underrepresented artists in our galleries, and to prioritizing inviting scholars, artists, leaders, and thinkers from historically marginalized groups for our programs.

Create an overall museum program that explores themes of justice and equality while modeling inclusive and anti-racist teaching: Building on WCMA’s long history of presenting exhibitions and public programming that question, challenge, and address

critical contemporary issues, and that prompt deep engagement, we commit to addressing racism and injustice of all kinds more directly through our curatorial and interpretive practice.

PLACE

Research and restitution work: Our work with NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act) continues in earnest. We are seizing the opportunity to transform NAGPRA compliance into a larger undertaking of tribal and inter-institutional collaboration, and to expand our perspective and position on Native American objects.

We recently joined the Monuments Men Foundation Network which serves to raise worldwide awareness about the service of the Monuments Men and Women during WWII, as well as to work toward full restitution of art looted by the Nazi regime.

Research and reinterpret the collection: As we research our global collection, reinterpretations that honor individual histories, cultures, and identities are a priority for our scholarship and presentations. We will continue the critical work of reassessing our permanent collection with the understanding that collections that have been shaped by the Western canon undeniably present an incomplete history of artistic achievement that often obscures the contributions of women, LGBTQ+ artists, persons of color, and makers we cannot identify. We will explore ways in which we can activate historical collections to address the issues and values of our contemporary society.

Interrogate institutional history and museum collecting practices: We commit to the ongoing work of interrogating the museum's history and collecting practices. We are currently reviewing and revising our collection priorities guidelines to more clearly emphasize our values around DEIA in curatorial practice and to align those efforts with this plan.

Building programming study:

Our building programming study, with the guidance of Deborah Berke Partners, includes a focus on issues of DEIA when thinking about space needs, qualities of environment, physical accessibility, sustainability, and creating as welcoming and inclusive a space as possible.

Partnering with Stockbridge-Munsee Community: We are researching the land under Lawrence Hall (our current location) and the proposed site for a new museum building. We have incorporated land acknowledgment into our programming and will create a presence for it on our website. Williams College resides on the ancestral homelands of the Mohican Peoples, also known as the People of the Waters That are Never Still, and the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. We pay our respects to the Mohican Peoples, past and present, as well as future generations. We will work to support the Stockbridge-Munsee local community in constructive and collaborative ways

and to learn from and with them through professional development workshops and other opportunities.

Public Art + Civic Engagement: WCMA is committed to building community and diversifying the local landscape through public art and its engagement with local communities. WCMA has formed an advisory task force in response to the College's request for consultation about art on campus. This group meets to discuss potential projects with priority given to those which foster our DEIA mission, capitalize on our history of engagement with artists, and incorporate the voices of the campus community. We will engage with student-created, civic partnerships, as well as museum-facilitated public art projects especially as creative and cathartic ways of addressing the most pressing issues of our time.

Cross-campus collaboration: In each of our efforts listed above, we will prioritize opportunities for campus outreach and collaboration, so as to foster an inclusive and cooperative atmosphere, leverage expertise, and produce more substantial outcomes and lasting change.