



## GIBBES MUSEUM OF ART

# Plan for Increasing Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion (DEAI)

### Overview

The journey to creating a stronger Gibbes community through Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion (DEAI) begins with acknowledging and assessing our institution's history and present practices.

We start by acknowledging the history of the Gibbes Museum of Art and the people whose land on which the institution sits. To the best of our knowledge, the Gibbes inhabits the traditional lands of the Cusabo people, a family of tribes along the South Carolina coast, including the Ashepoo, Combahee, Coosa, Edisto, Escamacu, Etiwan, Kiawah, Stono, Wando, and Wimbee.

Established by a group of prominent businessmen and political leaders as the Carolina Art Association (CAA) in 1858, the Gibbes Museum of Art is recognized among the oldest arts organizations in the United States. In 1905 the CAA found a permanent home for its growing art collection when James Shoolbred Gibbes (1819–1888) a descendant of an old Charleston family, and an enslaver, bequeathed a large sum of money to the city of Charleston for the erection of an art exhibition hall. The office of the mayor turned to the CAA to serve as co-owner and custodian to the new building. The James Shoolbred Gibbes Memorial Art Gallery, today known as the Gibbes Museum of Art, opened to the public in 1905.

The membership of the CAA remained all male until 1905 when its constitution was revised to allow female membership. A limited number of women were allowed to serve on the Board with no voting rights until 1921 when the right to vote was extended to women through the Nineteenth Amendment.





In 1932 for the exhibition of the Old Master paintings collection of Samuel Kress, special segregated evening hours were created for the duration of the exhibition, which was the earliest documented opportunity for Black Americans to visit the Gibbes. The first known work of art by a Black American was purchased in 1950. Otherwise, the Gibbes remained segregated at least until public schools were desegregated in Charleston County and most likely until the late 1960s and early 70s. In 1973 the Gibbes organized its first solo exhibition of a Black American artist. The works were by South Carolina native William H. Johnson (1901–1970).

Today, the Gibbes serves as the principal repository of the visual record of the Lowcountry with a permanent collection of over 7,000 paintings, works on paper, photographs, and sculpture. Yet only a small fraction represents the diverse demographics of the community (see [Demographic Data](#) document created in FY2021). Much work still needs to be accomplished to fulfill the Gibbes Mission to offer a thorough knowledge of the visual culture of Charleston, the Lowcountry, and the American South from the colonial era through today.

Starting in January 2022, the Gibbes committed to DEAI skill development for Gibbes' leadership, staff, and volunteers. There is intellectual work to do (learning new vocabulary, problem-solving and communication techniques), but much more of the journey is one of courage, relationship-building, and self-discovery. We all have a part to play in serving our mission with greater inclusion. The journey requires sharing our identities with one another and compassionately revealing our blind spots and biases.

This process will require that we continue to investigate our own history and that we accept the importance of truth-seeking as an essential element of healing and reconciliation. This process will build upon the commitments in the Gibbes Manifesto (adopted in 2016), and consider data included in the Demographic Data document (created in 2021) and its subsequent updates.

With the assistance of the DEAI Committee, comprised of Gibbes board members and staff, the work the Gibbes is embarking upon is to strengthen our cultural competencies, to increase our effective and appropriate communication with people of other cultures and backgrounds. In addition to expertise in art history, customer service, and cutting-edge digital innovation, the Gibbes leadership, staff, and volunteers need DEAI skills and policies to serve and reflect the entire Charleston community and to attract its increasingly diverse visitors.

For too long museums have been elite institutions not everyone felt welcomed to visit and enjoy. We aim to shift that paradigm. We are committed to acknowledging and celebrating differences while ensuring all members of our community feel seen and valued. We unlock diversity's power and beauty by intentionally fostering an inclusive, accessible museum fashioned upon a foundation of equity. Only by promoting and living out these values can we truly democratize belonging in our museum and set an example for our field. Art is not neutral, abstract, or solely for aesthetics. It powerfully informs and even creates culture and mores. Consequently, art makers and art stewards have profound ability and responsibilities in shaping and influencing the world around them. As we frequently note, "Art is the reason."





## DEAI Committee (formed March 2021)

A Committee comprised of Board members, staff, volunteers, and community representatives, its mission is to increase Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion in the culture of the Gibbes Museum of Art. The Committee will work with local and regional community groups, religious organizations, and other institutions to better reflect the broader Charleston community we serve. It will ensure that Gibbes members, artists, and audiences identify the Museum as a valued institution and experience a sense of belonging, regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, physical/mental ability, or socio-economic status.

## Major Elements of DEAI Plan (adopted March 2022)

### Governance and Community

1. Commit to an annual DEAI audit by the DEAI Committee to review progress and establish new objectives using the Gibbes Demographic Data document created in FY2021 and subsequent updates. The DEAI Committee will provide an annual report on Gibbes diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion (DEAI) progress to the full Board of Directors in Executive Session and provide regular updates on DEAI initiatives to staff and volunteers. We will focus initially on issues of race as our priority. The disparity in the demographics between the Gibbes and the community in which the Gibbes serves is the greatest with respect to race, including those who visit, those who are employees, those whose art is displayed, those who provide services to the Gibbes, and those who lead. The Gibbes is committed to addressing all forms of diversity to ensure that we are inclusive and accessible, regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, physical/mental ability, income, or religion.
2. Increase the representation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) individuals on the Board of Directors.
3. Support Board DEAI plan through the formation of a new Board Committee in FY2021.
  - a. Increase representation of BIPOC Directors in Board leadership positions.
  - b. Increase representation of BIPOC Directors in auxiliary board leadership positions.
4. Implement approaches to increase representation of BIPOC in Gibbes Fellows and general members, and in the memberships of the auxiliary groups.
5. Implement new Supplier Diversity Policy to award increased levels of business to Diverse Suppliers (defined as companies owned by BIPOC, women, LGBTQIA+, and/or veterans).





## Board Recruiting and Training/ Hiring, Training, and Retention of Staff

6. Encourage and provide opportunities for all Board members, staff, and volunteers to attend training workshops on DEAI and include DEAI training as part of the orientation held for all new Board members.
  - a. Training will include strengthening cultural competencies, building awareness of unconscious bias, unconscious privilege, and other forms of discrimination, including issues specific to the Gibbes, but also the cultural sector at large.
  - b. We will provide training on the following timeline:
    - i. Board introduction to DEAI initiative in spring / summer FY2022.
    - ii. Training for all Gibbes Board members, auxiliary board members, employees, and volunteers beginning in FY2023.
    - iii. Training annually thereafter for Board members, employees, and volunteers.
  - c. Update Employee Handbook and Board Code of Conduct/Ethics documents to reflect the Gibbes' policies relating to Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Inclusion and reporting of violations of such policies.
  - d. Ensure all staff, Board members, and volunteers know the policies for addressing racist statements or actions and the various procedures for reporting violations of professional conduct in person and/or confidentially and send once-yearly reminders of the policies and procedures to all groups.
7. Commit to hiring and promoting BIPOC candidates to senior leadership roles, including all open positions.
  - a. Job openings will be advertised through museum recruiting avenues targeting diverse candidates. Implemented in FY2023. Avenues include Southeastern Museum Conference (<https://www.semcdirect.net/listing/>), Association of African American Museums (<https://blackmuseums.org/jobs/>), American Alliance of Museums (<https://aam-us-jobs.careerwebsite.com/jobs/>), among other diversity-oriented job boards on the internet.
  - b. Develop and provide specific recruiting guidelines and training for all museum department heads to identify unconscious bias and to employ more effective tools in the interview process.
8. Invest in recruiting, hiring, retaining, and advancing BIPOC candidates and staff across the institution, including curatorial, education and programs, development, finance, visitor services, operations, and security.
  - a. Conduct a comprehensive salary equity review to ensure competitiveness and equity for all positions.
  - b. Review the current structure of Internships and Fellowships as follows:





- i. Establish relationships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in SC and relevant undergraduate affinity groups at other colleges to develop paid internship positions.
    - ii. Establish memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with colleges and universities, to support a pipeline of BIPOC individuals for internships, fellowships, and permanent positions.
    - iii. Organize internship program around a mission of developing leaders with the goal of increasing inclusion and diversity among museum leadership.
  - c. Work with the Gibbes volunteer groups to increase diversity of its members, with the goal of more closely reflecting the city's ethnically diverse population and neighborhoods.
- 9. Provide ongoing resources and support for staff mentoring and community building among staff.
  - a. Establish a greater focus on valuing community as part of onboarding process.
  - b. Support cross-department employee resource groups to support engagement and projects, thus fostering open dialogue regarding Gibbes decisions and initiatives and offering support for professional and career development.
  - c. Implement training on giving and receiving healthy feedback as a part of the employee onboarding process. Make explicit the channels through which supervisees may give feedback ~~to both direct supervisors and other organizational directors across departments.~~
  - d. Support and facilitate affinity groups for underrepresented staff.

## Collection and Programing

- 10. Further strengthen a program of exhibitions, events, and publications addressing complex and unfamiliar narratives, which include cross-cultural perspectives, fostering a more diverse and expanded canon of art history.
  - a. Realize greater diversity in future exhibitions, installations, and programs over the next three years.
  - b. Implement a fund to support initiatives, exhibitions, and acquisitions in the areas of diverse art histories.
  - c. Consider timing, approach, and engagement with current events during the development of critical programming.
  - d. Implement community consulting committees for select exhibitions and gallery reinstallations, with a mandate to critique concepts, expand and challenge the perspectives, support the development of new narratives and interpretations, and scrutinize institutional biases. Implemented in FY2021.





- e. Amplify work of BIPOC curators, scholars, external collaborators, and artists in Gibbes programming.
  - f. Foster engagement between local communities and the Development and Digital departments in addition to existing connections with the Education Department to further diversify audiences and messaging.
11. Diversify the collection and its narratives.
- a. Focus first and foremost on what we already have (i.e., the objects in our permanent collection), including discussion of their arrival at the Gibbes and how we can best display and contextualize them. This will continue to be a greater priority than adding to portions of our collection that are already very strong.
  - b. Support cross-departmental collaborations and presentations that engage multiple perspectives and divergent views. Make space for alternative, conflicting, and dissenting voices. Foster understanding of connections across cultures, geographically and historically.
  - c. Emphasize the diverse social, political, and economic context of Gibbes objects and their entangled histories.
  - d. Expand focus on collecting art by BIPOC artists. Additional details will be set forth in the Gibbes Collections Policy.
  - e. Identify funds within the 10-Year Strategic Plan goal of \$5M for acquisition endowment to increase the amount of works by BIPOC artists in our 18th through 21st century collections.
  - f. Commit to intellectual investment by supporting new scholarship and publications about art by BIPOC artists, building their legacy and re-examining history. Bring the voices of art historians, critics, and other scholars to the interpretation of portrayals of Black subjects and Black culture in all periods of American art history.
  - g. Expand our strong program of collecting contemporary Southern art through the 1858 Prize.
  - h. Present a refreshed and diversified narrative, including discourse on cultural heritage. Collaborate with local cultural leaders, curators, and voices in the upcoming major reinstallations of our permanent galleries.
  - i. Implement strategies for an approach to the display and representation of underrepresented populations. Review and update the contextual information and dialogues within our current collection.
  - j. Prioritize programming on the Gibbes digital channels that highlight diverse perspectives and expand narratives on the past and present of art history. Integrate multimedia content/context in gallery displays.
  - k. Consider a long-term plan to redistribute the locations of specific collections and special exhibition areas within the Gibbes to heighten presence and create new sequences of narratives.





## Membership, Fundraising and Private Events

### 12. Community Enhancement and Expansion.

- a. Identify communities and groups that are currently underserved by the Gibbes.
- b. Extend invitations to select communities for inclusion at various museum events as a form of introduction to the museum.
- c. Bring the museum to local communities through neighborhood workshops, tangible art installations, and neighborhood art festivals – i.e., “Gibbes on the Go”.
- d. Expand fundraising efforts to also include relationship-based and grass-roots fundraising approaches that nurture smaller donations from vastly larger audiences.
- e. Continue partnership with Charleston Public Library while fostering partnerships with additional groups to distribute free art supplies and arts-related games and books to schools, libraries, and communities.
- f. Examine ways in which Gibbes facility can be made available for community-based event use by the broader community and more diverse groups.

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***“Through our complicated history, through light and shadow,  
we have preserved — humanity intact. Art is the Reason.”***

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(GIBBES MANIFESTO, 2016)

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