

To the General Museumgoer
Who We Assume Is Part of Our Colorless Mass:

In recent months, it has been brought to our attention that our inadequacies as an institution are now subject to public scrutiny, and because we would rather issue a statement of solidarity than actually redress our discriminatory practices rooted in socioeconomic, racial and political inequity, we have taken upon ourselves to internally investigate misconduct. Our immediate response has been to decry the deep seated views which have prolonged our engagement with systemic change. Nonetheless, we hope this obligatory letter will be enough for the ravenous hordes.

A damning indictment of art institutions concerning their discrimination against, erasure of, and overall general distaste for BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, and disabled communities has opened the floodgate of reactive strategies from museums and galleries, of which we are no exception. Our goal is to follow the crowd by virtue signaling and overwriting a strategic plan that will most certainly be altered, postponed, or assigned to marginalized groups within the institution. As non-melanated interlocutors who are recycling jargon within our homogeneous ranks—without consideration, and true knowledge, of what it is we're repeating—we rely on the extraction of BIPOC labor to form our parasitic assemblages of delayed Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion initiatives. As an imperialist, ableist, white supremacist bureaucracy, we absolutely understand the disparaging comments that have alienated our publics who deem us unresponsive to their needs, however we must decidedly disagree as we have no understanding of how intention does not equal impact. Much has already been done toward our goal of inclusivity, including [enumerates strategies that were ineffective as a way to show false accountability]. In addition to our navel-gazing, we intend to radically overhaul our systems of operation by restructuring our staff, exhibition programming, and community outreach initiatives. The board, however, will remain untouched for the time being. Similarly, we will continuously suppress any attempts at salary transparency, as we rely on free labor of hopeful interns and starvation

wages for everyone not in senior leadership. We hope the distraction of performing equity will direct attention from our utter dependence on the powerbrokers of the institution. If it does not, we will recommit to adhering to more diverse structures of operations another fifty years from now; at that time leadership will have most certainly died off, proving that power will only be ceded if pried from our cold, dead hands.

We absolutely deny (and thereby condone) the colonial histories of museums as part of a cycle of subjugation that we masquerade as culture, no matter the epistemic violence inflicted upon the conquered, the vanquished even, which has filled our repositories and fattened our pockets through admissions fees and organizational memberships. Like our missionary predecessors whose purpose was to bring light to darkness, we too have a social responsibility to educate the ignorant masses, to preserve and decontextualize objects under the guise of stewardship, and to deflect any criticality that would bring our methods of doing such into question. This is the purpose of mission statements: to articulate our importance to the public good. Of course, we will reject this comparison to a colonial framework, and instead, choose to remain obtuse when charged with decolonizing the institution—a demand stated plainly enough by various groups, but one that elicits confusion and trepidation from everyone in leadership and most of the Ivy League educated curatorial staff. We are much more comfortable with the classic white supremacist settler response: endlessly deflect, begrudgingly accept our failures (if we acknowledge them at all) and then move toward exoneration at lightning speed by promising new ways forward that rarely materialize. Still, we will continue to write misleading labels, attend art fairs and biennials that glorify national alliances (cf. curatorial departments), and insist on being arbiters of cultural patrimony—all to the detriment of sincere populist concern.

As director, I fervently believe in the power of listening, and want to emphasize that this museum has taken an active role in taking the necessary steps toward correcting its mistakes. We recognize our complicity in perpetuating systems of inequality, and our primary focus moving forward will be reducing the harm we've caused to the wider

community. When our institution was founded in 2025 after the multi-year reckoning that erupted in statements condemning overt and systemic racism of this sector, we made a promise to reflect on the past to steer us in the direction of a more equitable future. Although we were financed by defense contractor turned pharmaceutical company X, we now only accept blood money whose paper trail can be properly obfuscated.

We began as a social justice museum and stand against all forms of exclusion, with the exception of the types we violently enable. With an arrogance that aligns us with our predecessors, we were undeterred by the ongoing state of affairs, confident that an absence of institutional memory would deter four centuries of compounded racial capitalism and cultural hegemony in this country. In fact, it was imperative that one of our first hires be the Chief Diversity Officer (CDO), a key position on our anti-racism task force. After a hasty search, the CDO quit after six months on the job; though they complained about being “tokenized and terrorized,” our cis white able-bodied staff has never felt that way at our institution so it simply cannot be true. We feign ignorance about the layers of white supremacist delusion this person was forced to contend with. (Secretly, or perhaps not so much, we’ll attribute quick turnover rates & overall lack of retention of BIPOC staff members to *their* ineptitude, rather than the pervasive toxicity of workplace culture. The next person, overburdened by the responsibility to fix the cumulative effects of systemic racism with no real support, will also try—and fail—to change the institution.)

The arts sector suffered for years to re-invigorate itself after finally acknowledging its material dependency on the widespread exploitation of marginalized artists and cultural workers. The indelible mark of the COVID-19 pandemic could be seen in our approach to reform the museum-industrial complex: an approach that outwardly values flexibility and innovation above all else. Limiting the spread of the virus once meant museums closed their doors, if only briefly. Once re-opened, institutions relied on frontline staff to grin and bear the disastrous consequences of this premature decision. However, inspired by a post-pandemic understanding of the fungibility of human lives, the Executive Director of Visitor Services

and Museum Metrics devised a new strategy that minimized safety protocols, which in turn, lowered operating expenses. Under this financially nimble model, we eliminated part-time and hourly positions that were already a fraction of the obscene salaries of high-level staff, and sacrifice our Black and Brown front-of-house workers in Visitor Services, since they are so easily replaceable. With a portion of employees no longer accounted for in Facilities and Security positions—instead sporadically hiring local police to fill out those departments—we have been able to turn our attention to revenue-generating activities and more streamlined interactions that bolstered museum experience, including incessant digital content.

The progress that has been made thanks to these decisions is stunning: in a span of three years, the institution has sent out 425 different surveys, convened 38 panels, started 12 committees, developed 15 task forces, conducted 115 focus groups, and hired 1.5 minorities. We are still seeking to understand how we can create a more transparent and open environment.

Because our permanent collection remains overwhelmingly white and male, our collecting practices are currently under examination. To remedy these intentional “oversights,” we will prioritize the acquisition of blue chip BIPOC artists within the foreseeable future—not their works, but the artists themselves. They will be installed in our galleries, Summer of 20XX. Relatedly, we’ll present diversified narratives meant to expand our telling of art history in major reinstallation spaces, first by using consultants to aid with this work and then by creating a three-year fellowship position to assist in interpretation. The latter role will be funded by [big name foundation] and will not be a permanent position, nor lead to a permanent position on staff. The fellow will be underpaid, and their work will go uncredited for the duration of their employment. However, since they will be BIPOC, their temporary presence will certainly go far to make us appear as if we are fulfilling our stated mission towards inclusion; we have included in the job description that they will be available for any and all photo ops so as to highlight the diversity of our staff.

Elitism and symbolic reformism will not be disimbricated from museum practices in fear of death to the Museum as we know it. Take for instance in 2021; for the six months that “equity” lasted, we saw a glimpse of a different world on the horizon, a revolution that resulted in a 25% increase of BIPOC administrators in positions of power across museums. The percentage of womxn in leadership positions also increased exponentially. However, unsupported and antagonized by white supremacy and internalized misogyny within the ranks, these innovators and activists left en masse, which led to a precipitous drop in ethnic and gender diversity. The moment was auspicious, but fleeting. *Museum semper idem.*

The sincerity of this letter cannot be overstated, but to reiterate, it truly is. I believe in our collective potential for making a fair tomorrow. We can and must do better, but, for all reasons known and listed above, we most certainly will not.

Regards,
N.E. Wyatt-Pearson, Director

This letter was written by a participant in the BICI *Curatorial Futures* program who has chosen to remain anonymous in keeping with the style of the text.

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