

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Commitment



In 2019, ArtsWorcester began planning a strategic initiative to increase the diversity of our artists and audiences. Many of Worcester's vibrant cultural communities have been long underrepresented and underserved by our work, and addressing this relative homogeneity was an urgent responsibility owed to our city, to contemporary art, and to our future. The historic events of this spring have only strengthened our commitment to this work.

Art has the power to start and sustain difficult conversations. It allows people to find common ground and create alliances they might not otherwise. With its ability to address every possible topic, visual art has long engaged with ideas of race, power, and survival. And artists are found among all Americans, regardless of race, sex, sexuality, gender identity, physical ability, neurology, age, religion, or citizenship.

These truths are not enough, however, to bring change to the artistic, professional, and public spheres in which ArtsWorcester participates. It is most urgent for us to address the underrepresentation in our galleries of artists who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). We stand in solidarity with them against white supremacy.

Learning and education are core to our mission. To create racial equity within the organization, we must teach ourselves first, and we have much to learn. Working towards substantive anti-racist change and radical inclusivity is an ongoing effort, requiring continued learning and re-calibration, a process to which board and staff fully commit.

Below are our actions so far, our commitments for the coming season, and another for such time as we are able to again host public events. In following years, ArtsWorcester will take additional specific steps towards greater equity, to extend our opportunities to all, and to further improve the contemporary art of our region.

So far:

A committee to create greater diversity, inclusion, and equity within ArtsWorcester has been established, including board members, staff, and community leadership. This work forms one of the four core strategic goals of our FY2021-2023 strategic plan. The committee reports to the Board of Directors, and is charged with determining strategy and activities for an increased alignment of ArtsWorcester participants to the city's demographics.

The Board of Directors approved a zero-tolerance policy for any employee, volunteer, or artist member who demonstrates racist behavior or engages in racist speech, either within the galleries or without. Relatedly, we will not accept funding from an individual or organization that has demonstrated racist behavior or engaged in racist speech.

Last spring, for the committee that determines solo exhibitions in our galleries, we recruited BIPOC arts professionals so that the committee reflected the ratio of white/non-white people within this city. We commit to maintaining that ratio, and further diversification within that committee.

We recognize that in the past, we have exhibited artwork engaged in unintentional racism or cultural appropriation. We commit to engaging artists in dialogue about the perhaps unintended consequences of an artwork, offer opportunities to learn and reconsider, and, if necessary, invoke our standing right to deny exhibition of any work.

Coming up this year:

We will host an online speaker series of topics relating to the intersection of race and contemporary art, drawing on expertise within this community and fostering connections within it.

Print and electronic publications about exhibiting artwork and visiting the galleries will be translated into Spanish and Vietnamese.

The juror we engaged for the Nineteenth ArtsWorcester Biennial, Beth McLaughlin, brings particular expertise at the intersection of art, craft, and activism. As we plan for juried exhibitions in FY2021 and beyond, we commit to engaging more BIPOC jurors, and charging White jurors to consider artworks from broader aesthetics and visual iconography than found in a White-dominant art world.

When we are able to gather together in person: we will fully implement the fledgling North Corridor Gallery, a partnership program with organizations that represent underserved populations. The North Corridor Gallery operates without membership or budgetary requirements for our partners. It introduces new communities to our work, and brings new artists into our exhibiting membership.

ArtsWorcester is accountable to the underserved populations we seek to elevate. As we move forward with programmatic changes, we will continuously seek honest feedback and evaluations from participants, and will adjust accordingly.

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