

Alice L. Walton Foundation, Ford Foundation, Mellon Foundation, and Pilot House Philanthropy Announce Investments for More Diverse Leadership in Art Museums

Art institutions receive over \$11M to develop new leadership and curatorial positions to increase racial equity in the sector



Credits: Installation view, Joseph Stella, *The Voice of the City of New York Interpreted*, 1920-1922. *Seeing America: 20th & 21st Century*, The Newark Museum of Art. Photo by Bryon Summers.

(NEW YORK, NY – May 3, 2023) Today, four national funding partners, **Alice L. Walton Foundation, Ford Foundation, Mellon Foundation, and Pilot House Philanthropy** announced the **Leadership in Art Museums (LAM)** initiative. Over the next five years, the LAM funders will commit over \$11M in funding to museums to increase racial equity in leadership roles such as curators, conservators, collections managers, community engagement staff, educators and other senior leaders in a manner designed to advance racial equity.

As platforms for civic engagement, museums are vital public spaces. Intended to serve the communities around them, they play a critical role in fostering dialogue, creative expression, and community engagement and fortifying democratic principles. Museum leaders—from curators to board members—play a key role in determining the art on display in these cultural institutions. A 2019 study found that only 1.2% of works in all major U.S. museums were created by Black artists, with 9% for Asian artists and only 2.8% for Hispanic and Latinx artists.

With an expanded group of funding partners, LAM will build on past and existing efforts to create more racial equity in leadership roles across the art museum field. In addition to welcoming new partners—Pilot House Philanthropy and the Mellon Foundation—LAM is bolstered by the learnings from and impact of recent key initiatives; these include the [Diversifying Art Museum Leadership \(DAML\)](#) project, the recently created Black Trustee Alliance for Art Museums, and related initiatives like the Mellon Foundation’s ongoing Art Museum Staff Demographic Survey to increase diversity in museums. Mellon’s recent research

and surveys found significant underrepresentation of Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Arab, Asian, Pacific Islander, and other people of color in institutional leadership positions. For example: only 20% of museum leadership and 20% of conservation staff identified as non-white. While hiring trends from 2021 and 2022 show slow and steady progress, leadership museum roles are still overwhelmingly held by white staff.

“Ultimately, the future of museums depends on their ability to stay relevant and serve their communities,” said **Alice Walton, philanthropist and founder of Alice L. Walton Foundation**. “The LAM museums represent a variety of regions across the U.S., and help ensure that we’re increasing access to museum roles in a way that’s inclusive of communities of color, no matter where the art institution is based. With this dedicated group of funding partners, we’re united in our commitment to achieve long-lasting impact.”

“If we want the arts in this country to stay vibrant, moving, and transformational, it’s imperative that these institutions bring in more diverse perspectives and lived experiences,” said **Darren Walker, president of the Ford Foundation**. “Leadership in Art Museum’s vision is to grow and invest in diverse leadership at U.S. art museums to ensure their excellence and relevance in the future.”

A competitive and thorough selection process identified 19 museums across the country for LAM grants to create and sustain new leadership positions. The museums have pledged to make these permanent. In hiring for these positions, the museums also pledge to develop a diverse pool of applicants in a manner that is inclusive of communities of color, including Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Arab, Asian, and Pacific Islander communities.

“Some of our proudest work recognizes and elevates the role of arts and culture within Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) communities to heal, protect, and restore mental and physical health—not only at the individual level, but also at the community and systems level,” said **Joël Barraquiel Tan, executive director at Seattle’s Wing Luke Museum**. “With this additional support, we can bring in more staff, develop programming in a vibrant, holistic model, and provide training for emerging staff and interns that advances our internal culture of health and wellbeing.”

“Our new Dr. Johnnetta Betsch Cole curator position, named in honor of the Jacksonville native and internationally regarded educator, scholar, and cultural leader, will help us realize Ninah Cummer’s vision that the museum be a center of beauty for all,” said **Andrea Barnwell Brownlee, Ph.D., director and CEO at the Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens** in Florida. “With the LAM support, we are on course to expand our audiences and invite more visitors to explore and engage with our collections, gardens, and programs.”

The LAM recipients are diverse institutions with local and national impact spanning geography, size, and cultural focus. As a shared goal, they are fully committed to developing and nurturing museums’ leadership roles that will demonstrate and create a more inclusive art world.

The 2023 LAM museums receiving these awards are:

Arizona State University Art Museum, Phoenix, Arizona
Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens, Jacksonville, Florida
The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Massachusetts
Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, Kalamazoo, Michigan

MASS MoCA, North Adams, Massachusetts
McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, Texas
Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson, Mississippi
Museum of the City of New York, New York, New York
Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Illinois
Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles
The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri
The Newark Museum of Art, Newark, New Jersey
Oakland Museum of California, Oakland, California
Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts
Perez Art Museum Miami, Florida
Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon
Riverside Art Museum, Riverside, California
Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, Missouri
Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience, Seattle, Washington

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About the Alice L. Walton Foundation

Founded in 2017, the Alice L. Walton Foundation works to enhance the quality of life for individuals through providing access to offerings that improve well-being and create diverse and inclusive communities. The foundation focuses on philanthropist Alice Walton's commitment to increasing access to the arts, improving education outcomes, enhancing health, and advancing economic opportunity for all. Through this work, the foundation strives to deliver meaningful and lasting change to individuals and communities most in need. Learn more at [AliceWalton.org](https://www.alicewalton.org).

About the Ford Foundation

The Ford Foundation is an independent organization working to address inequality and build a future grounded in justice. For more than 85 years, it has supported visionaries on the frontlines of social change worldwide, guided by its mission to strengthen democratic values, reduce poverty and injustice, promote international cooperation, and advance human achievement. Today, with an endowment of \$16 billion, the foundation has headquarters in New York and 10 regional offices across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Learn more at www.fordfoundation.org.

About The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation is the nation's largest supporter of the arts and humanities. Since 1969, the Foundation has been guided by its core belief that the humanities and arts are essential to human understanding. The Foundation believes that the arts and humanities are where we express our complex humanity, and that everyone deserves the beauty, transcendence, and freedom that can be found there. Through our grants, we seek to build just communities enriched by meaning and empowered by critical thinking, where ideas and imagination can thrive. Learn more at [mellon.org](https://www.mellon.org).

About Pilot House Philanthropy

Pilot House Philanthropy is an entity of Barbara and Amos Hostetter's Boston-based family office, Pilot House Associates, which invests in leaders and organizations that aim to contribute to a kinder, more equitable, creative and sustainable world for current and future generations.

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