

# PRESS RELEASE

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## **SEATTLE ART MUSEUM (SAM) ANNOUNCES A COMPREHENSIVE NEW PLAN FOR RACIAL EQUITY**

Board of Directors vote for dissolution by 2022, assets to be transferred to local BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) organizations

SEATTLE, WA - The Seattle Art Museum (SAM) announced today a ground-breaking initiative to address the systemic and institutional racism that pervades every corner of American life, including cultural institutions such as The Seattle Art Museum. In 2017, the museum's Equity Team wrote, **"We think critically about the role art plays in empowering social justice and structural change to promote equity in our society. We are dedicated to racial equity in all that we do."**

In an emergency session last week, SAM's Board of Directors voted unanimously to honor this commitment by empowering a special Board taskforce to dissolve the SAM corporation by 2022, transferring all assets and endowments to a trust governed by a coalition of local BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) art organizations.

"Now is not the time for half measures," says Amanda Cruz, SAM's Illsley Ball Nordstrom Director and CEO. "SAM strives to enrich lives through art as an essential part of a healthy and vibrant community. As the region's leading visual art institution, in this time of national mourning and struggle, our mission of social justice has never felt more urgent."

"Periodically, it's a good idea to ask, 'What would this community be like if we didn't exist?'," says Stewart Landefeld, Chairman of the Board of Trustees. "At our meeting last week, the Board had the vision and fortitude to realize that structural inequity is central to how large American art museums like SAM operate. By dissolving, SAM puts itself at the frontier of reparations."

"We think of this not as the end of something, but as the beginning," says Carla Lewis, President of the Board. "By disrupting business as usual we can incubate the future of art in our region. SAM's \$300,000,000 in assets, plus a still-to-be-determined amount raised by disposing of the approximately 25,000 works in the collection, will be a powerful investment in our community's future with a fantastic rate of return."

Over the next two years, SAM will responsibly wind-down museum commitments, deacquisition, repatriate or return collections to donors, and transfer all assets to the newly formed Trust. Museum facilities will revert to Museum Development Authority of Seattle, a part of the City of Seattle, to be used for public purposes. Bob Ferguson, Washington State Attorney General, has issued an opinion that while SAM's collection was formed under the auspices of serving the public good, the dismantling of the collection, by serving a greater public good, should be permitted by law.

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“Unwinding the affairs of the museum and distributing its assets will be a fascinating process. I’m looking forward to tackling this in collaboration with the SAM community,” says SAM CFO Cindy Bolton. “I do not believe a museum dissolution of this scale has ever been attempted. SAM’s closure since March 12 due to COVID-19 is certainly a helpful beginning. This has already set in motion a suspension of normal operations.”

The beneficiary of SAM’s assets will be a cooperative community trust organized by a coalition of BIPOC-led (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) regional art organizations. Membership in the coalition is still in formation. Invitations to lead the effort have been extended to the twelve organizations listed at the end of SAM’s June 7th communication *Black Lives Matter: A Message of Solidarity*.

Full time, part time, contract, interns and temporary employees will receive generous severance packages and job retraining assistance. CEO Amanda Cruz has offered to work for the newly formed cooperative trust in a fundraising capacity with an annual salary of \$30,000. In recent years, SAM is proud to have consistently raised \$40,000,000 a year in gifts, grants, and contributions. Cruz says she has every expectation of being able to raise comparable amounts for the Trust.

“As John Maynard Keynes once said, the accumulation of wealth for its own sake is a kind of mental illness,” says Cruz. “We are committed to the health of our community. Our core values at SAM are creativity, excellence, equity, engagement, diversity, accessibility and stewardship. Going forward, we will responsibly conclude museum business, distribute our assets into a community trust, and initiate a wonderful new chapter for repairing our regional art ecosystem.”

#### **ABOUT SEATTLE ART MUSEUM**

As the leading visual art institution in the Pacific Northwest, SAM draws on its global collections, powerful exhibitions, and dynamic programs to provide unique educational resources benefiting the Seattle region, the Pacific Northwest, and beyond. SAM was founded in 1933 with a focus on Asian art. By the late 1980s the museum had outgrown its original home, and in 1991 a new 155,000-square-foot downtown building, designed by Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, opened to the public. The 1933 building was renovated and reopened as the Asian Art Museum in 1994. SAM’s desire to further serve its community was realized in 2007 with the opening of two stunning new facilities: the nine-acre Olympic Sculpture Park—a “museum without walls,” free and open to all—and the Allied Works Architecture designed 118,000-square-foot expansion of its main, downtown location, including 232,000 square feet of additional space built for future expansion. The Olympic Sculpture Park and SAM’s downtown expansion celebrate their tenth anniversary in 2017.

#### **ABOUT THIS PRESS RELEASE**

This is a work of speculative fiction. Facts and quotations are invented. However, much of the language comes from official SAM communications and dollar amounts are factual. SAM is not the originator of colonial White supremacy. In fact, it perceives itself as working to mitigate these harms and many of SAM’s employees engage in this work with integrity. Nonetheless SAM, as an institution, has underlying structures that naturalize and reproduce colonialism, racism, anti-blackness, gender-policing, and socioeconomic disparities. We do not need more representations of diversity, equity, and inclusion from institutions that hoard wealth and resources – we need transformative actions.