

Kelsey Museum of Archaeology Statement on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility, and Sustainability (DEIAS)

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility, and Sustainability at the Kelsey Museum

The Kelsey Museum of Archaeology is committed to building and sustaining an open and accessible museum for visitors, researchers, and the local community and to making [Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility, and Sustainability](#) (DEIAS) a priority in every aspect of our [Mission](#).

We are working toward this goal by improving access to the collection and to the Museum's work more generally, reaching out to broader audiences, and cultivating an inclusive workplace and scholarly forum. In doing so, we wish to include and amplify underrepresented voices and experiences—past and present—in our exploration of the ancient world. Because our commitment to DEIAS is ongoing, we expect this document to develop to reflect new goals and priorities, as well as accomplishments.

Our DEIAS Commitments and Initiatives are intentionally aligned with the Kelsey Museum's core [Values](#). These include:

- *Stewardship*: balancing collection care with accessibility
- *Research*: advancing knowledge in a reflexive, responsible way
- *Education*: engaging more diverse audiences directly with the past
- *Discovery*: exploring new and underrepresented areas of antiquity
- *Creativity*: fostering inclusive collaboration and presentation
- *Respect*: finding strength in collaboration by valuing each other's expertise and diverse perspectives

Acknowledgments

An important first step in changing our institution is acknowledging the colonial and racist histories that continue to shape the discipline of archaeology and American higher education generally:

- The Kelsey Museum and the University of Michigan are located on the lands of and have grown through connections with the Anishinaabe, Wyandot, Seneca, Delaware, Shawanese Miami, Sauk and Fox, Peoria, and other Indigenous peoples. These peoples have an enduring kinship with this land, and we acknowledge their contemporary and ancestral ties. Indigenous people from

these and other nations reside here and make contributions to Michigan, Ann Arbor, and the University. The College of Literature, Science, and the Arts is in the process of reaching out to Indigenous leaders and museum professionals in the State of Michigan to discuss relationship-building and community engagement, in coordination with the University's Indigenous Alliance Group. The Kelsey Museum will follow the College's guidance in building relationships and engaging Indigenous groups.

- The Kelsey Museum's collection encompasses a range of material from the Mediterranean, North Africa, and Middle East dating from prehistory through the medieval period. Much of the collection was formed within the colonial geopolitical framework of the early twentieth century, when Western nations competed for economic and cultural control over large parts of Africa and the Middle East. Most of the artifacts preserved at the Kelsey Museum were excavated during U-M-sponsored expeditions that took place in the 1920s and 1930s in Egypt and Iraq. These artifacts were then brought to the United States through legal "division" agreements made with the Egyptian and Iraqi governments, which at that time remained under the influence of colonial authorities. A smaller number of artifacts were purchased on the antiquities markets of Europe and other parts of the world or donated to the museum. The research, publications, and collections that have emerged from these activities benefit the University community in many ways, from hands-on learning opportunities for students to the dissemination of new information about the ancient world. But they are also part of an extractive archaeological legacy, one in which knowledge and material culture were legally commodified and taken from local communities by those in positions of power.
- The Kelsey Museum's earliest collections are a product of the University of Michigan's early interest in biblical history and classical education. Even while Francis Kelsey, director of the initial U-M excavations, strove to expand and challenge the traditional study of the Graeco-Roman past, the classical tradition remains a central component of the Museum's research, curatorial, and educational programs. We acknowledge that the discipline of classics has privileged Eurocentric histories and participated in the construction of "Western Civilization," in contrast to and at the expense of African, Asian, and Indigenous cultures. For example, materials in the collection derived from the continent of Africa largely originate from Egypt and Tunisia and are linked to Graeco-Roman and/or Pharaonic cultures. The absence of artifacts from other ancient African cultures, such as those of Nubia, reflects the Eurocentric worldview that shaped the Kelsey Museum's collection. We also acknowledge that museums such as ours were enabled by the idea that "civilized" Western nations are the true inheritors of the "great civilizations" of the past. The Kelsey Museum now rejects

this way of thinking and recognizes our need to turn a critical eye on our collection history and practices and to make this information available to our stakeholders. To learn more about the collection, refer to the following:

- A brief note on the Kelsey's [collection history](#)
- "Kelsey Museum of Archaeology: 1928–2017" by Christopher Ratté, in [Object Lessons and the Formation of Knowledge: The University of Michigan Museums, Libraries, and Collections, 1817–2017](#)
- [Passionate Curiosities: Tales of Collectors and Collections from the Kelsey Museum](#) by Lauren E. Talalay and Margaret Cool Root (available for free download)
- [In the Field: The Archaeological Expeditions of the Kelsey Museum](#) by Lauren E. Talalay and Susan E. Alcock (available for free download)
- [The Life and Work of Francis Willey Kelsey: Archaeology, Antiquity, and the Arts](#) by John Pedley (full text available online through the U-M Library)
- Our current [Acquisitions policy](#)
- The Kelsey Museum's collection contains human remains, including a mummified child from Egypt currently on display. The museum has an [internally developed policy](#) to ensure the respectful and responsible treatment of these remains, but wider community input is needed as museum practices continue to evolve.
- Museums and universities across the country have spent the past several decades transforming their institutions into more inclusive environments for research and learning. In spite of these efforts, Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) students, scholars, and professionals, as well as members of other marginalized groups, remain underrepresented in these spaces. In addition, many local communities continue to be excluded from decision-making in archaeological and museum research, perpetuating structural inequities. We recognize that the Kelsey Museum is a traditionally White institution and that we have considerable work to do to establish a truly inclusive practice both in the Museum and in the field. The Kelsey Museum's DEIAS Commitments and Initiatives are a first step toward that goal.

Commitments and Initiatives

While these acknowledgments are crucial to enacting institutional change, we recognize that concrete efforts must be undertaken in order to transform the Kelsey Museum into an outward-looking, welcoming, and accessible institution that elevates the voices and experiences of all community members, including those from marginalized groups. Our commitments listed below reflect the desired outcomes of our DEIAS mission and will frame our current and future initiatives. This is a living document. The list below is not exhaustive and will be updated regularly. The Kelsey Museum will:

- Improve access to Kelsey Museum research and collections, both in person and online.
 - Current projects
 - Develop free, online curriculum resources compatible with the State of Michigan’s curriculum standards that can be downloaded by teachers, families, and communities (ongoing; [Egyptian materials](#) were completed in the spring of 2022, sets on Nubia and on Mesopotamia and Iran are planned to be released by the 2024–25 academic year, and future sets will cover Greece and the Roman Empire)
 - Add DEIAS resources to the Kelsey Museum’s docent training to help facilitate discussions on topics including diversity in the ancient world, ancient slavery, colonialism, imperialism, white supremacy in archaeology, museum ethics, and the collecting history of the Museum (ongoing)
 - Participate in [Museums for All](#), an Institute of Museum and Library Services–sponsored access program that encourages people of all backgrounds to become regular museum visitors (ongoing)
 - Improve the display of text and objects in the galleries using a more legible typeface, Freight (ongoing)
 - Digitize archival materials for inclusion in the Kelsey Museum’s [online database](#), as appropriate; increase the number of images of artifacts available for free download in the database (ongoing)
 - Future projects
 - Provide gallery guides in English and Spanish. There are also plans to translate the guide into other languages
 - Critically examine the history of the Kelsey Museum’s collecting practices and make this information readily accessible
 - Provide captioning for live events that are hosted via Zoom
 - Update programming spaces to improve audio accessibility
 - Improve wayfinding accessibility
- Conduct research in a way that acknowledges and counteracts historical inequities of global imperialism and colonialism. This includes working alongside local scholars, students, and community members to formulate and complete shared research projects that align with local stakeholders’ goals.
 - Current projects
 - Participate in “Narrating Nubia: The Social Lives of Heritage,” a U-M Humanities Collaboratory project that seeks to engage and co-create the past, present, and future cultural heritage of Nubia with local stakeholders in Sudan, as well as members of its diaspora in the United States

- Construct a community-driven heritage center at El-Kurru and carry out community-engaged site preservation work at Jebel Barkal, Sudan (ongoing)
 - Install a multinationally co-curated exhibition at the Sohag National Museum in Egypt, featuring objects excavated at Abydos by U-M and by 19th-century archaeologists, in collaboration with the curatorial and conservation staff of the Sohag Museum (nearly completed), and host online content connected to the exhibition, which is of interest to the children, adult residents, and archaeologists of Sohag Province
 - Develop a collaborative, contributed two-volume publication from the Egyptian and international project team working in Egypt at the Abydos Middle Cemetery, incorporating innovative approaches to understanding ancient material culture through modern practices and attitudes (currently underway)
 - Future projects
 - Community-engaged sustainable tourism development at Notion, Turkey
 - Development of visitation site management of Weni tomb complex at Abydos, Egypt, in collaboration with regional inspectorates and local stakeholders
- Create equitable and just professional environments by incorporating the principles of anti-sexism and anti-racism into our museum and fieldwork.
 - Current projects
 - Hold regular DEIAS Committee meetings. The committee—comprised of Kelsey staff, faculty, and students—was formed in order to identify specific DEIAS priorities and to plan steps for achieving them (fall 2020–present)
 - Create an Internal Operations Committee to address the Kelsey Museum’s climate and operational concerns identified through an internal survey of Kelsey staff, faculty, and students (ongoing; facilitated by [ADVANCE](#))
 - Develop a sexual harassment policy that ensures a safe and equitable work environment for those working on Kelsey Museum field projects (ongoing; see the [statement](#) on workplace Sexual Harassment)
 - Increase awareness of unconscious bias among hiring committee members and carefully examine job posting qualifications to reduce unintentionally exclusionary language and requirements
 - Provide DEIAS training for docents

- Explore partnerships with community members and scholars, including those traditionally underrepresented in the field of archaeology, to represent a multiplicity of perspectives about the past.
 - Current projects
 -
 - Future projects
 - Create opportunities for graduate students and staff to curate exhibitions through the [Kelsey in Focus](#) program
 - Engage with scholars from the Department of the History of Art, the Department of Middle East Studies, and the Arab American National Museum, as well as with descendant communities, to plan a permanent exhibition of Byzantine and Islamic artifacts in the Kelsey Museum's galleries (ongoing)
- Produce and curate knowledge about the past that highlights the histories of typically silenced people, absent places, and neglected material remains.
 - Current projects
 - Plan for the permanent display of Byzantine and Islamic artifacts from the Kelsey Museum's collection
 - Conduct archaeological fieldwork at El-Kurru and Jebel Barkal, Sudan, which creates new understandings of the ancient cultures of Nubia (Kush), an area that was excluded in the history of the Kelsey Museum's collection acquisition