OUR LIBERATION IS BOUND TOGETHER

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
DIVEST FROM GENOCIDE
FREE PALESTINE
We are assembled here because there is a genocide happening in Palestine, with the suffering and resistance of the people of Gaza at the forefront of our world-historical moment. Extending seventy-six years of occupation, dispossession, and war, the genocide is waged by the entwined settler-colonial regimes of Israel and the United States, with steadfast support from the governing classes and the institutions of the crumbling imperial order. The Brooklyn Museum is complicit with these atrocities through the actions of its trustees, sponsors, donors, and the investments of its endowment. Taking action today, we uplift the powerful statement released by employees of the Brooklyn Museum on November 12 of last year: “We are writing in our capacity as workers at the Brooklyn Museum to unequivocally recognize Israel’s ongoing actions in Gaza as genocide of the Palestinian people; to stand with Palestinians as they resist violent colonial occupation and apartheid; and to call on our colleagues in the cultural field, as well as our Brooklyn Museum community, to join this movement.” Since the release of that letter, the movement has indeed spread and grown, with tens of millions of people worldwide crossing a threshold of freedom through the marches, direct actions, solidarity encampments, and de-occupations on university campuses. Enduring repression and countermobilization of all kinds, the people have insisted that Palestine is Everywhere, and that the liberation of Palestine is a requisite for the liberation of all. Why? Because the same forces driving, committing, and profiting from the genocide are harming each of us as well, however unevenly. Free Palestine calls forth the interconnectedness of struggles, the commonality of enemies, and the shared affirmation of life, land, and liberation across movements, borders, and identities. The fear-mongering tactic that equates anti-Zionism with anti-semitism has lost its hold over the minds of people from all backgrounds, not least for the Jewish comrades showing up en masse to declare “not in our name.” As universities transition to a summer schedule, the energy of the free Palestine movement has moved back into the city, its streets, and its institutions—including museums.

We know that through its leadership, trustees, and donors, the Brooklyn Museum is entwined with past and present violence against Palestine. Think of long-time BDS opponent Anne Pasternak, whose directorship is named in honor of Shelby White and Leon Levy, known for their support of archaeological fieldwork led by the Israel Antiquities Authority; Board Chair Barbara Vogelstein, a supporter of the 2017 “Governors United” initiative to rally lawmakers combating the rising tide of BDS; Board Treasurer Neil Simpkins, a senior managing director at Blackstone, which profits from the housing crisis and is deeply invested in Israel’s military and tech sectors; or board member Jill Bernstein, president of the Friends of the Israel Museum. High-profile corporate sponsors of the Museum include Bank of America and Dior (owned by Moett Hennessy Louis Vuitton) both of which have long been targeted by divestment campaigns.

We also acknowledge that the museum stands on stolen Indigenous land, and we insist on connecting this ongoing history of dispossession to the occupied lands of Palestine. The land underneath is now considered “public” land, owned and granted to the museum by the City of New York, which annually extends generous subsidies to the museum’s general funds. As a consequence of this City funding, the institution is publicly accountable for its other financial entanglements. These include returns from its substantial endowment, partially invested in the stocks of companies that are involved, directly or indirectly, in the genocidal project of Israel.

As the museum workers put it in their letter last year, “We recognize the dissonance between the way that cultural institutions amplify and historicize justice movements of the past, while working to fully engage those in the present.” Now is the time for the museum’s leadership to engage in the present, with the following demands as a framework:

**PREAMBLE**

**1. RECOGNIZE/DECLARE**

We demand that the Brooklyn Museum recognize that a genocide is ongoing in Palestine, and make a public declaration to this effect. Scholars, jurists, faith leaders, and human rights advocates around the world—including the International Federation for Human Rights and the South African legal team who brought charges against Israel in the International Criminal Court—agree that the assault on Gaza has assumed the dimensions of a genocide. The evidence for that judgment includes the indiscriminate bombing of civilians, the mass displacement and ethnic cleansing of the general population, and the use of starvation and dehydration as existential weapons of warfare. In addition, many experts have classified the wholesale destruction of Gaza’s universities and most of its schools and libraries as acts of manslaughter, while others have classified the destruction of museums, archives, places of worship, heritage sites, and other cultural buildings as acts of cultural terrorism. The Museum leadership has no reason to doubt these experts, and, as an institution dedicated to the exhibition and dissemination of culture, its leadership should publicly condemn these acts of warfare listed above as crimes against humanity.

**2. DISCLOSE/DIVEST**

We demand that the Brooklyn Museum commits to Disclose and Divest. Anticolonial struggles extend to the museum, and require the full disclosure of the Brooklyn Museum’s investments as a necessary act along the path of divesting from companies that profit from the arming of Israel, its genocidal war in Gaza, and the business of its occupation of Palestine. Divestment is not a metaphor. Backed by direct action, divestment is a tool of abolition and decolonization, taking aim at the raw financial power of corporations and states that benefit from genocide, and the soft power of institutions that normalize it in the educational and cultural realms. Divestment frees up space for other ways of gathering, assembling, studying, moving and creating together.

**3. REPAIR/CARE**

We demand that the museum open itself to measures of community repair and care.

We assemble here in the spirit of reparation and care for communities conquered and looted by colonialism. These include far-flung places and neighborhoods just a stone’s throw from here. Land, wealth, and culture are among the historical plunder, and institutions like the Brooklyn Museum are a direct beneficiary. The museum has taken small steps to address historical wrongs, including a Land Acknowledgement reading in part, “We are committed to addressing exclusions and erasures of Indigenous peoples, and confronting the ongoing legacies of settler-colonialism in the museum’s work.” What material commitments does this acknowledgement bring with it? What does the museum leadership have to say about the land and people of Palestine, and the outpouring of solidarity with Free Palestine by Indigenous movements in Turtle Island? As for its notorious collection of looted objects from the Americas, Africa, and Asia, the Museum took a baby step, in 2021, by voluntarily repatriating pre-Columbian artifacts to Costa Rica. We call for a fuller public disclosure of the origin of the Museum’s collection; the circumstances under which artifacts were acquired, and the moral case for returning them to their communities of origin.

At the museum’s own doorstep, the ongoing pillage of housing and livelihoods proceeds through the economic violence of investors and developers, many of whom sit on museum boards, while the ongoing trauma comes at the hand of armed police whose primary mission is the protection of property and the repression of dissent. We recognize the role that the Museum has played—along with its donors and trustees—in downtownterritification, including the racialized displacement of its historically Black residents. To fully live up to its branding as “the people’s museum” would be to reinvest financial and cultural resources in nearby communities who have the right to stay and thrive in place. Brooklyn is not a selling point in a realtor’s portfolio. Nor should it be a training school for settlers including the racialized displacement of its historically Black residents. To fully live up to its branding as “the people’s museum” would be to reinvest financial and cultural resources in nearby communities who have the right to stay and thrive in place. Brooklyn is not a selling point in a realtor’s portfolio. Nor should it be a training school for settlers.