OUR MISSION

We connect everyone to the dynamic history, cultures, and art of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders through vivid storytelling and inspiring experiences to advance racial and social equity.
Dear friends of the Museum,

If 2023 told us anything, it was that art and culture have incredible healing power. In the best of times, our exhibits, programs, and education work promote a sense of belonging, joy, hope and wellness. During our most challenging times, our role as a keeper of art, culture, heritage and vivid storytelling draws people together to reflect and heal.

This past year, as the pandemic subsided, our primary focus was taking those tentative steps out of isolation — and back to our community. But emerging from the pandemic, a new reality awaited us – making our Arts & Culture as Apothecary approach so very essential.

The lingering effects of the pandemic, devastating environmental disasters, and looming, consequential global and national elections remind us that art, culture, and heritage, specifically for underrepresented communities, matters.

What is Arts & Culture as Apothecary? Why does it matter? Arts & Culture as Apothecary (ACA) is our practice, our way, that fosters a deep sense of wellness and healing within the communities we serve. Brought to life through our signature Community Advisory Committee model — where we create hand-in-hand with community members — ACA is centered around art, culture and heritage as a ‘tonic’ that offers joy, hope and wellness to a community. While it may sound new to some, it is, in fact, a vision we’ve held close for years. It is only now, during these challenging times, that we have amplified this approach in our exhibits, programs, education initiatives and advocacy work.

The Museum itself experienced the effects of ACA when it was a target of a hate crime in September. Though that act exposed humanity’s darkest impulses, it also revealed humanity at its very best. In the immediate aftermath of that crime, we experienced an overwhelming abundance of love, support and solidarity by our community. We have long been a place of healing, and our community reciprocated in kind.

The influence of ACA this past year was ubiquitous. Despite the pandemic’s negative impact on the arts and culture community, the Museum bucked this trend. We performed well, reporting record daily attendance numbers and a 65 percent increase in new memberships. We are confident that this is because of the authentic joy and connection promoted through our work, and strong relationships with our community.

But to continue performing well, we must plan for the future. Our Futures Planning Process took shape in 2023 and creates a sustainable growth path for the organization. To that end, we have recruited three strong executive leaders who both stabilize business operations — and play key roles in our five-year strategic planning process. Our leadership team, along with our Futures Planning committee, have been at work to finalize this plan in 2024.

As a place keeper for the C-ID, we recognize the fragility of the neighborhood. Out in the community, the Museum took this to heart. In the spring of 2023, our organization, as one of many protectors of the neighborhood’s heritage and culture, continued its advocacy. Joining a diverse group of community members, we opposed the proposed Sound Transit 3 site location, at 5th Avenue an infrastructure project that continues to threaten our historic neighborhood and small businesses. Threats like this are not new. Through the decades, the C-ID withstood the devastation of I-5’s construction, multiple sports stadiums, historic underfunding and, of course, the pandemic. Because of these challenges and more, the National Trust for Historic Preservation recognized the cultural significance of the C-ID and declared it as one of the country’s 11 most endangered historic sites.

Still, the Museum challenges the notion that the C-ID is in decline. We frequently spotlight the community’s renaissance, highlighting legacy businesses and new ones. Examples include: Uncle Bob Santos’ place opening just across from the Museum; the landmark presence of Tai Tung, Seattle’s oldest Chinese restaurant; the recent launch of the ACRS food bank; the opening of Kilig, the second restaurant of James Beard Award finalist, Chef Melissa Miranda; the always comforting familiarity of the Harbor City Restaurant; the opening of Mom’s Bakes on Maynard Avenue; Hing Hay Park; and our acquisition of the Eng Family Homestead (the last remaining and most intact single-family home in the C-ID). We plan on making this historic building part of our community-based exhibits. These are just a few of the exciting things happening in the neighborhood and we are using our cultural and heritage place keeper role to champion the C-ID’s renaissance!

Conclusion

Arts & Culture as Apothecary, the concept that culturally rooted arts contribute to a well society, is our guiding light. It inspires our exhibits. It informs our youth and educational programs. It is the beating heart at the center of our work, from the launch of new exhibits, to our advocacy efforts. It was foundational to our every move in 2023 and will be for years to come. We accomplished many things in 2023 and we faced a number of setbacks, too. But strengthened by both, the Wing Luke Museum, thanks to our staff, volunteers and community, is in a better position than ever to continue serving our mission.

Siempre,

Joel Barraquiel Tan
Executive Director

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Trustee Co-President

Jill Nishi
Trustee Co-President

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The Ford Foundation, a 50-year-old charitable organization committed to social justice and human welfare, has a long history of support for culture, art and heritage institutions. But when the pandemic struck in 2020, they took their work to an entirely different level. The Ford Foundation launched their America’s Cultural Treasures initiative, which raised more than $156 million to sustain vital BIPOC arts and culture organizations severely impacted by the pandemic. America’s Cultural Treasures is a national program that values the diversity of artistic expression and excellence and provides crucial funding to organizations that, despite their historically limited resources, leave a mark on the country’s cultural landscape. They recognized, through that gesture, that these organizations merited investment to ensure that their work could continue.

In 2020, the Foundation, along with regional partners, awarded grants to 20 culture and arts organizations, including the Wing Luke Museum. Foundation partners are The Bar Foundation, Getty Foundation, Herz Endowments, Houston Endowment, John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Joyce Foundation, McKnight Foundation, the Ralph M. Parsons Foundation, Terra Foundation for American Art and the William Penn Foundation. The Museum received a four-year grant totaling $3.1 million that enabled it to stabilize and even plan for the future. There was more to the program, however, than simply providing financial support. The Foundation saw the grants as an investment and conducted a 5-year impact analysis to identify areas of growth and strengthening during the grant period. The Ford Foundation wanted its grantees to become more resilient and durable organizations.

“To call this grant transformative is an understatement,” says Joel Barraqueil Tan, executive director of the Wing Luke Museum. “It not only allowed us to stabilize during one of the most challenging times in history for nonprofits, but it gave us the freedom to look, with optimism, toward the future of our Museum and implement operational, finance, staffing and facility enhancements to make that future feasible and sustainable.”

Joel also acknowledged that the America’s Cultural Treasures designation served to validate its decades-long work in telling vital stories of the Asian American experience, a sentiment echoed by the Ford Foundation’s Rocío Aranda-Alvarado, Ph.D., senior program officer, Creativity and Free Expression.

“The stories that the Museum tells are based on the personal experiences of people in the community — real stories, real American stories — in the broadest sense of the term, told from the perspectives of those who lived them, rather than from a single curatorial voice. And this continues to be unusual, especially in the museum world,” she says. “But community-based museums that use stories sourced from their own communities? The fact that the Wing Luke Museum was doing this in the mid-60s, marks it as a treasure.”

Ensuring stability of these arts and culture organizations was a key driver for the Ford Foundation, but Rocío acknowledges other, broader motives for the Foundation investment, as well.

“Artists are problem solvers. Artists, through their work, hold a mirror up to society,” she declares. “It’s almost like artists create these moments of witnessing and they give us the opportunity to become witnesses and keep that in our memories and in our minds through the work that they do. These two things, the fact that they are problem solvers and they reflect us, make culture an important way to shift inequality and move closer towards justice.”

Creating space for artist activists to have a platform is only made possible when the cultural and arts place keepers that make that platform possible have opportunities to thrive and grow.

The Ford Foundation’s 5-year impact study identifies areas of growth and opportunity during the grant period. By identifying areas of growth and opportunity — as well as challenges and threats — the Treasures are encouraged to develop durable operating models for the long term. Joel acknowledges that creating internal infrastructure and processes to support growth often brought growing pains — and the need to improve interdepartmental coordination and communication.

“Like any organization undergoing change, we have had to learn how to function like a growth-oriented entity, envision a long-term strategy, take thoughtful risks, right-size staffing capacity to carry out our objectives, and learn to evolve from an historic austerity mindset. It will be a process for us but one that I find exciting and invigorating.”

These challenges, collectively among the 20 Cultural Treasures, were not unanticipated, which is why the impact study was part of the initiative. Lessons learned and data collected help the organizations adjust as they move to optimize the seed funds and create sustainable systems that ensure their long-term futures.

The Ford Foundation grant, essentially, established the fertile groundwork to transform the Cultural Treasures, and hopefully inspire additional investment as well. Rocío hopes it stimulates additional investment.

“Essentially what we hope is that other funders will take up this role of thinking about how to support these organizations that have been under resource, that have been marginalized, that haven’t been brought into these funders’ portfolio,” she emphasizes. “That’s what we really hope: we want funders to continue to look into it and also to think about general operational as opposed to project funding, multi-year as opposed to single-year. Changing all these practices that were just invented — we can change things if we want to. That’s what we are hoping to do. Just to help people keep the doors open, to keep staff paid, keep the lights on. That’s what needs to be done.”

Amplifying marginalized voices. Ensuring artists have platforms to do their community healing work. Empowering BIPOC cultural institutions to build capacity, to think big, to plan for their futures with confidence. Inspiring other funders to follow suit. These are the extraordinary effects the Ford Foundation initiated through their America’s Cultural Treasures grant program. The program’s rationale for this makes most evident in Rocío’s affinity for smaller institutions.

“My career has been in museums, in small community-based museums and so I have an affection for the way they work,” she concludes. “The big institutions copy what the small institutions have already done and they get all the credit for it. The most experimental things are happening in small community-based museums that I love.”
From a very young age, Såhi Velasco (they/them) knew they wanted to be an artist. As they came of age and grew up witnessing systemic oppression in the BIPOC community, their mission was forged. Today, the self-taught artist is a sought-after local creative and long-time contributing artist at the Wing Luke Museum.

“As I progressed in my life, went to school, finished college, focused on studying sociology and learning more about the impacts of systemic oppression on communities, especially Black and brown communities of color, I learned more about the ways my values aligned with my creativity and how to bring those stories together,” they recount now.

Såhi, who is a co-founding member of the Guma’ Gela Collective, is a former teaching artist at the Wing Luke Museum. They are also an Artist-in-Residence at King Street Station, commissioning graphic art and facilitating dance and healing workshops. Their current exhibit at the Wing Luke Museum, Guma’ Gela: Port Land, Port Sea, All Ancestry, runs through July 2024.

The Guma’ Gela Collective is a queer, CHamoru art team made up of members from the Marianas and Guåhan, which is part of the Pacific Islander Community. The ambitious exhibit uses a wide spectrum of platforms including sculpture, crochet, soundscapes, print making, fashion design, and more to connect attendees with CHamoru life, culture and tradition.

“I think that this particular exhibit is our invitation to people to think about healing,” they say, adding, “to remind ourselves that we can heal in our totality … and give ourselves permission to be seen, to exist authentically and within our whole selves. I think that when you walk into this space, in our exhibit, you immediately feel that.”

The Guma’ Gela Collective, it seems, embraces this role and thrives under the responsibility of inspiring hope, building relationships and healing communities from past generational traumas, especially within their Queer and Trans, CHamoru and Pasifika communities, against Asian hate, and social and economic oppression.

“Artists play such a significant role in the community and society,” says Såhi. “Because art is medicine for our heart in times that are really hard. I feel that art is a means of reminding us about hope and what hope looks like in practice. As artists our role in the community is to connect people and to remind ourselves of our humanity, our relationships.”

Såhi has come a long way since their early days as an aspiring artist. Back then, they had hopes of somehow making an impact on society through their work. They had emerging desires to make art that explored identity, championed cultural representation and boldly told meaningful stories. Today, as an accomplished artist, it is safe to say that they have achieved much of what they intended. Leading Guma’ Gela’s boundary-shattering endeavors, producing art that heals and connects communities; and, importantly, finding deep gratification in telling the stories of people who are often overlooked, Såhi is full of gratitude for their partnership with the Museum.

“For us as Pasifika artists… we were so, so grateful to have so much space to celebrate our stories, our individual art, our fashion and videos,” they say. “It was such an honor for us to be invited and to be reminded that our work is important.”
It was really exciting to listen to people’s stories,” she says. 

As a part of only a few Vietnamese kids growing up in her community, Doan felt different. She felt like an outsider. “That story meant something, she realized very early on. “That resonated in life altering ways.” 

She was hooked from that moment on. To say that she found a place where she belonged, would be an understatement. “I really take that (ACA) as finding ways for us to give spaces of healing for people in the community,” Doan declares. “When we heal our community, we heal ourselves, too. If we can take care of ourselves as individuals in the upmost way possible, to give us enough rest, to give us enough energy… we can produce great things to further heal the rest of the community around us.” 

Doan, the preservation of culture, keeping people grounded, and telling those stories is the healing; it is the well-being. And she humbly acknowledges her place in the bigger picture. 

Her life would be different from then on. “That’s when I wanted to stay in education and be an educator, so that kids who were struggling, having those feelings, could see that they weren’t alone. My story is something that they could relate to.” 

And that is what Doan values most about her work as an educator at the Museum, the chance to create space and to open new community dialogues. 

“The way that the Museum does its work is different than other museum spaces,” she declares. “Being able to uplift those stories, especially when the narratives of dominant groups are a certain way it’s nice to give space to people to push back and offset those things; giving platforms to people outside of the traditional ‘museology’ mindset.” 

“Coming here,” she adds, “you get a better picture of what it means to be a member of our community. And having that space is important for people to go to, or gather.” 

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In that gathering place in the space that allows one to see themselves, to know that their stories can be told, and to know that the larger community will hear them there is power. There is an inherent well-being and wellness. In light of growing social and cultural challenges, making space for the community is essential, which is why the Museum’s Arts & Culture as Apothecary (ACA) practice is timely and essential.

ACA is a concept that understands that the celebration of a community’s art, culture and heritage are essential to that community’s health and well-being. The more that art and culture are embraced and appreciated, the better overall a community is from the inside out, from its individuals to the larger community. It is what empowers communities that have been marginalized to find joy and hope. 

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“My work is about connecting and outreaching to folks in the local community, schools, and different organizations and opening up those doors … to see what our Museum has to offer.”

The Doan of today is very much different from the Doan of more than 12 years ago. She is confident. She is assured. She knows her calling as an educator. She has gained perspective from knowing who she is, and takes comfort in knowing that she can help others know who they are, too.

“It’s giving visitors a space to see themselves in maybe a way they have never seen themselves before; being able to witness that validation for students that see that their stories are here.”

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As a part of only a few Vietnamese kids growing up in her community, Doan felt different. She felt like an outsider. “That story meant something, she realized very early on. “That resonated in life altering ways.” 

She was hooked from that moment on. To say that she found a place where she belonged, would be an understatement. Stories just like hers, told by people who looked like her, resonated in life altering ways. As a part of only a few Vietnamese kids growing up in her community, Doan felt different. She felt like an outsider, feeling unseen and incredibly isolated. She came to lose her differences.

“I’m second generation Vietnamese American and my parents came over as refugees in the early 1980s. In this era of growing up, there weren’t a lot of Vietnamese kids in my classes and stuff like that,” she recalls. She found herself wanting to be anything but Vietnamese, anything but Asian American.

“A lot of those feelings definitely fueled my childhood and into development of who I would become. It was a lot of self-hate; I just wish my name could be ‘Sarah’ instead of Doan, which is a Vietnamese name.”

It was at the University of Washington where that all began to change, Doan recalls. The change she began to experience came in part due to a course named Contemporary Problems for Asian Americans. The class helped her understand where her early feelings had been coming from; it planted a seed that helped undo what she had learned growing up. She drank it all in, even studying other communities of color in her course work.

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“My role as an advocate is to tell people to come to the Wing.”
- Sheldon Arakaki, Wing Luke Museum Patron

“I bring friends,” he says, proudly. “They don’t necessarily have a community-focused museum like this one in their area that tells our stories.” Sheldon truly relishes the opportunity to “show them the kind of place this is, to show them what’s possible.”

Actively involved in the Japanese American Citizens League, a civil rights organization serving the AANHPI community, Sheldon’s values align with the Museum’s social activist work.

“I consume everything the Museum has offered,” he says. “The exhibits are community focused... the exhibits themselves are rooted in the community for what is happening here, in our history, and about our stories.”

He admires the Wing Luke Museum’s courageous and often unflinching approach to telling stories that others do not. His passion for the Museum has not gone unnoticed, of course.

“It is difficult to fully express in words our gratitude to Sheldon for the many ways he invests in the Museum,” says Cassie Chinn, deputy executive director at the Museum. “He has been instrumental in ensuring that we continue to serve our mission through not only financial support, but using his own platform to raise awareness of our exhibits and programs that tell the complex stories of the Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities we serve. He is a true friend of the Museum.”

Sheldon supports the organization for many reasons, and among them is the incredibly powerful role that heritage, culture and art play in promoting a sense of wellness and well-being within the community. He understands the foundational role institutions like the Museum serve in re-enforcing identity, binding generations together, building community pride and promoting an incredible sense of belonging. To Sheldon, this is why he so passionately invests in the Museum’s work.

“For me it’s about telling our story in our words — controlling the narrative. It comes from the community, so it is ours,” he emphasizes, before speaking directly to members of the AANHPI community: “You exist, this is your history, this is where you come from, especially if you don’t know it. These are the struggles your ancestors had to get you to where you are today. With this understanding, you can see what the possibilities are maybe for the future.”
Oral histories matter. That is the premise of the Wing Luke Museum’s ongoing series, Understanding History. The powerful educational program examines colonialism, unpacks how racism emerged from it, and outlines advocacy strategies to change the power structure. What makes the program so powerful, of course, is its incredible focus on the individual and personal experiences of its diverse storytellers.

Funded through multi-year grants from the Institute of Museum and Library Sciences (IMLS) and the Tateuchi Foundation in 2020, the online series launched in 2021. It features panelists from a diverse group of community members who share their own personal accounts and family histories, in some cases dating back to the 1800s.

According to Senior Community Programs Specialist Charlene Mano Shen, who heads up the program, the first seeds for Understanding History date back to the 90s when the Clinton Administration launched its Race Talks potluck programming. This inspired the Museum to host a few potlucks of their own, which eventually gave birth to the Museum’s first race-focused contemporary art exhibit “Beyond Talk” in 2004, and a second exhibit, “Under My Skin” in 2012.

Over the years, the Race Talks potlucks, the racial equity exhibits, and the Museum’s signature Community Advisory Committee process influenced the decision to focus on this topic. The murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement gave more impetus to the issue. From this, the series was born. Each program covers a different topic such as “In the Shadow of Colonialism” in 2021, “Why We Are Here (parts one, two, and three)” in 2022, which explores origin stories; and “Why We Work for Change” in 2023, which shares stories of resistance.

“We are trying to pick stories that get people to understand about large reparations, structural racism, colonialism, even looking at these structures like policing and how neighborhoods develop, to create this base of understanding,” says Charlene. “The Museum does this in different ways, like the “Nobody Lives Here” and “Resisters” exhibits, and they continue to do that through these personal stories.”

To date, five Understanding History programs have been created, with focus on the pioneer generations of various Asian/Pacific Islander communities and the immigrant labor force. Future events will amplify other BIPOC communities and tie in their family stories, embedding them in historical events and contemporary issues.

“I feel that we don’t have a public understanding of history. We might know the dates but we don’t have a deeper understanding of how those dates and policies shaped our attitudes, shaped our parents’ attitudes, and our grandparents’ attitudes.”

In the end, Charlene believes the Understanding History series not only documents a unique perspective on history, but it brings a deep sense of wholeness, well-being, and strength to the community whose stories are being told, often for the first time.

“It gives everyone a sense of worth, and gives them a connection to others,” she says. “You find your people; you find your community.”
It’s not every day that you can walk into a museum — and feel the strength of community radiating from the walls. That is only possible when community is built directly into the core storytelling formula. Every exhibit our team produces serves as a reflection and amplification of shared community experience that reminds visitors that art, history, and culture is very much alive.

In 2024, we’re excited to bring new stories to life in our galleries. In addition to our KidPLACE exhibit New Years All Year Round: Theater, Dance, and Sound, which shares an interactive look at the symbolism behind Lunar New Year’s many traditions, the Museum opens a new exhibit examining the role elders play in our communities. This spring, Hello Auntie, Hello Uncle: Conversations With Our Elders invites visitors to foster a deeper understanding about AANHPI elders, their lives, hopes, and challenges, while imagining a future where all of us can age and feel the love of community-powered care.

Soon after this opening is Confronting Hate Together, a joint project by the Black Heritage Society of Washington State, the Washington State Jewish Historical Society, and the Wing Luke Museum. This project, inspired by the 1937-1952 American Jewish Committee campaign to combat bigotry, explores what it means to fight against the rising tide of hate and racial violence in our communities today.

In June, We Can Be Heroes: Voting and Beyond, opens. This exhibit focuses on themes of civic engagement and empowerment and invites visitors to learn about AANHPI civic leaders and movements, the history of racial barriers to civic participation, and how communities and individuals can counter political disenfranchisement to demand change. With the 2024 election season underway, this exhibit is essential for anyone interested in getting involved.

Also on the horizon in late summer is a new art exhibition featuring the breathtaking work of Takuichi Fujii and a collection of visual artists. As an extension of the recently concluded traveling exhibit, Witness to Wartime, Wing Luke Museum’s exhibition examines the history and legacy of Seattle’s Nihonmachi (Japantown) through the eyes of three Japanese American artists.

Closing out the year in November is an exciting exhibition exploring what it means for Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Native Hawaiians to have our identities forever intertwined with the cultures, stories, and histories of our homelands. This exhibit is yet to be named.

YouthCAN and TeensWay, our free afterschool youth arts programs, nurture and teach artists of the future. You CAN’s 2023-24 cohort, Portraits of Places, is producing an exhibit paying tribute to youth artists’ favorite C-ID neighborhood locations. The exhibit runs from April 14 to late August. Teens WAY hosts a Ceramics Intensive in partnership with Reclalm Clay Collective, and introduces students to every step of pottery making. The TeensWay exhibit opens in September 2024. To learn more about these programs, visit www.wingluke.org.

As we look ahead in 2024, we hope that visitors continue to find rich connection with our exhibit storytelling. As a museum that holds and uplifts our collective experiences, we’re excited for you to see all the incredible experiences on the horizon.

Statement of Gratitude

This year, we express our deep gratitude and appreciation to our incredible community of donors, sponsors, foundations, and members that helped the Museum grow in ways we’ve never thought possible. You are our champions and your generosity serves as an undeniable driving force behind everything that we do in pursuit of our mission. Your belief in our work year after year ensures that our impact extends far beyond our walls to connect audiences to our unique stories and shared histories alike.
FISCAL YEAR 2023
FINANCIAL REPORT

Fiscal Year ’23 Revenue: $5,172,877

- Individual Contributions: $957,580 (18.5%)
- Government Grants: $909,806 (17.6%)
- Fundraising: $595,368 (12.1%)
- Administrative: $712,210 (14.5%)
- Program Services: $3,620,153 (73.5%)
- Foundation Grants: $2,013,940 (38.9%)
- Other Earned: $464,408 (9.0%)
- Admission & Tours: $409,690 (7.9%)

Fiscal Year ’23 Expenses: $4,927,731

- Program Services: $3,620,153 (73.5%)
- Administrative: $712,210 (14.5%)
- Fundraising: $595,368 (12.1%)
- Membership: $70,950 (1.4%)
- Other: $464,408 (9.0%)
- Foundation Grants: $2,013,940 (38.9%)
- Corporate Grants: $346,473 (6.7%)
- Other Earned: $409,690 (7.9%)

10% Donor Acknowledgment and Financials