

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 1, 2021

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Seattle Art Museum Workers Call for Boycott in Light of Inhumane Policies Targeting Unhoused People

SEATTLE, WA — (Occupied Land of Duwamish, Suquamish, and Tribes collectively recognized as Muckleshoot) Decolonize SAM, a collective of Seattle Art Museum (SAM) workers and community allies, is calling for a boycott in response to two new museum policies: The installation of hostile architecture, and the hiring of a private security contractor. These policies aim to deter and increase policing of Unhoused people near SAM property — a blatant contradiction of [SAM's equity statement](#) that further stigmatizes and endangers Seattle's most vulnerable community.

To amplify the boycott, Decolonize SAM has created a website, DecolonizeSAM.org, and outlined additional calls-to-action in their "[#BoycottSAM Action Toolkit](#)." Supporters are encouraged to cancel memberships, donations, and partnerships; submit feedback to SAM leadership; raise awareness with downloadable social media graphics; and to support local organizations that are operated by and center people of the global majority.

Announced in June 2021, SAM's new policies were met with immediate opposition by workers and members of the community. In a petition created following the announcement, workers listed cost-effective, compassionate alternatives that would support people experiencing homelessness in downtown Seattle, rather than punish or alienate them.

Leadership ignored SAM workers' concerns, proposed solutions, and community petitions. Bollards were installed outside of SAM property, and petition signers on staff were chastised in emails by CEO Amada Cruz.

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Throughout July 2021, workers were excluded from conversations about the policies, and an all-staff meeting dedicated to discussing the policies was canceled. Instead, a “Special Advisory Taskforce on Homelessness ” was created, consisting of Amada Cruz (SAM CEO), Priya Frank (SAM Director of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion), and three SAM board members — Stewart Landefeld, Carla Lewis, and Constance Rice. The taskforce was created without consultation of SAM workers, and criticism pointing to taskforce members’ absence of lived experience in homelessness, outreach, or substance use went ignored. To date, none of the task force’s plans or objectives have been shared with SAM workers.

On Tuesday, August 24, SAM security workers were told that Star Protection Agency, an outside security contractor, was hired to start security services the following day. SAM head of security had also expressed to workers that SAM would not invest in “social welfare programs” and that workers’ opinions will not be considered in future decision-making.

Leadership’s disinterest in consensus and favoring of property over people is not new to SAM workers. A culture of harassment, retribution, and intimidation has long plagued SAM workers who have voiced concerns over museum policies. Complaints to HR about racism, ableism, misogyny, sexual harassment, and concerns about the museum’s relaxed COVID-19 safety policies have been ignored as well.

Decolonize SAM’s boycott is part of a larger effort to highlight and dismantle settler-colonialist structures existing in museums today. Decolonize SAM believes that museums, as institutions that have profited from stolen work of marginalized and colonized cultures, have a responsibility of community care and reparations. Investing in privatization and policing of community spaces perpetuates harm against marginalized people, and is a misuse of SAM’s funds that should be dedicated to reversing that harm.

The boycott will not be lifted until the Seattle Art Museum reverses the installation of hostile architecture and hiring of private security, and commits to creating an accessible, beneficial experience for all visitors — regardless of housing and socioeconomic status, or mental and physical ability.

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