

ACC STL Members Learn About Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Saint Louis Art Museum

On March 31, members of the ACC STL had a unique learning experience at the Saint Louis Art Museum. They participated in the “Artful Observation with a Diversity Lens” program, which aimed to help participants develop their awareness of issues related to attentiveness, empathy, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Artful Observation is a project spearheaded by the Saint Louis University (SLU) Art History Program to establish curricular and research programs based on evidence-based methods about utilizing the visual arts to help students and professionals develop their awareness of issues related to attentiveness, empathy, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The facilitator, Dr. Cathleen Fleck, Ph.D., Saint Louis University, Chair of the Department of Fine and Performing Arts and Associate Professor of Art History, used Artful Observation techniques to enhance bias and observational awareness and facilitate conversation about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Art served as the catalyst to encourage conversations among the 20 members who attended.

“The Artful Observation session that I planned with the ACC at the Saint Louis Art Museum was meant to use art as a tool to engage the group and reinforce two key ideas about observation and about diversity and equity in society. First was to ask the participants to explain what they were seeing, breaking down that process of seeing as a physical act informed by our social and cultural circumstances. The attorneys quickly absorbed the main point that one’s own way to see is not the only way. Second, we concentrated on how certain artworks can reveal systems of discrimination and exclusion based on race, class, and gender that have long existed in our society,” said Fleck.

“We discussed artworks by underrepresented identities in the museum—particularly women, African American, and Native American artists—as signs of resistance, repression, strife, pride, and triumph over such challenges,” added Fleck.

Lisa Savoy, Legal Counsel, Experian, and 2023 ACC STL Social Justice Coalition Chairperson, said that the membership values the diversity programming that the ACC STL hosts and tends to have great turnout for events. The Artful Observation Continuing Legal Education (CLE) program was especially popular because Dr. Fleck presented diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) material from an artist’s perspective, which included a discussion of the moment in time and history, the individual artist’s training, and other aspects of the artist’s background, and the significance of the medium used for the artist’s particular vision. The program was limited to 20 spots and was so popular among members that there was a waitlist of members who wanted to attend.

“I honestly took away from this program a greater appreciation for the artist behind the art as well as a new appreciation for the different layers of a particular piece. I never really thought about the struggles that some artists had based on gender, race, or culture, and the fact that we have such well-known diverse artists at the St. Louis Art Museum is significant,” said Savoy.

Overall, the Artful Observation program provided an opportunity for ACC STL members to learn about diversity, equity, and inclusion in a unique way, using art as a tool to engage and educate. The program was well-received by the members, and it serves as an example of how organizations can incorporate DEI programming into their events and professional development programs.