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SEPTEMBER 29, 2017

THE DAVIS MUSEUM AT WELLESLEY COLLEGE WINS “BEST SOFT POWER CULTURAL ACTIVATION AWARD”

ART-LESS Initiative Recognized at Leading Culture Destinations Awards Event



WELLESLEY, Mass. – Today, at the [Leading Culture Destinations Awards](#) event in London, the [Davis Museum at Wellesley College](#) won the *Best Soft Power Cultural Activation Award*. The honor recognizes the ingenuity and global impact of [ART-LESS: the Davis Without Immigrants](#), an initiative and intervention launched by the Davis Museum in February 2017.

ART-LESS responded to President Trump’s first [executive order](#) on immigration, issued on January 27, 2017—a proposed “Muslim ban” on entry to the United States that left many feeling alarmed, threatened, and frightened. The goal of the ART-LESS initiative was to demonstrate the critical role that immigrants to the United States have played in the arts, via both their creative contributions as artists and their philanthropic roles as museum donors. It also articulated the Museum as a public space for critical discourse on matters of national importance.

**MADE BY AN
IMMIGRANT**

#ART-LESS

Dr. Claire Whitner, Assistant Director of Curatorial Affairs and Senior Curator of Collections, says “the Davis puts cultural pluralism at the heart of our mission; to take that seriously means to create programming that emphasizes that value and defends it when threatened.”

During this six-day event, which encompassed the American “Presidents’ Day” holiday, the Davis Museum de-installed or shrouded all works of art in its permanent collections galleries that were either created by or given to Wellesley’s art collection by immigrants to the United States. Approximately 120 works of art—roughly 20 percent of the objects on view in the Museum’s permanent collections galleries—were either taken down or covered in heavy black cloth. Signage was posted next to each affected piece to indicate “Made by an Immigrant” or “Given by an Immigrant.” The concept and its impact were dramatic, particularly in light of a sluggish response among most American museums. The initiative garnered extensive international media coverage.

“I believe that museums can be important political spaces,” said Lisa Fischman, the Ruth Gordon Shapiro ’37 Director of the Davis, “for generating discourse, social engagement, and smart activism. Through actions like ART-LESS, the Davis takes a stance on contemporary issues, modeling social activism and political integrity for students—for the next generation—and for the larger community. Particularly at this moment in the nation’s history, it is

extremely important to demonstrate the impact of immigrants—past, present, and future—on American cultural life. *ART-LESS* posed an invitation: taking the Davis as a microcosm, one might extrapolate out and consider the tremendous impact of immigrants on the nation as a whole.”

The *ART-LESS* initiative at the Davis Museum demonstrated an amplified sense of “soft power”—proving that museums might well expand the original definition toward a more engaged and discursive learning opportunity for a global community. The idea at the Davis rests on experience and success, most recently with the spring 2015 exhibition, *Parviz Tanavoli*, the artist’s first US museum retrospective and first solo presentation in the nearly forty years since the Iranian revolution.

The Davis Museum would like to thank [Stoltze Design](#) in Boston for the pro bono graphic identity used in the intervention in the permanent collections galleries.

ABOUT THE LEADING CULTURAL DESTINATIONS AWARD

Leading Culture Destinations is a platform created to explore, recognize and promote the world’s best destinations for cultural experiences.

Set up by Florian Wupperfeld and Bakul Patki, together with a team of art and travel enthusiasts, it aims at sharing knowledge and recommendations from a global network of leading professionals from the arts, fashion, music and film.

The company aims to support both emerging and existing arts institutions and cultural travel destinations, highlighting the practices and solutions that raise the standards of the cultural sector worldwide.

ABOUT THE DAVIS MUSEUM

One of the oldest and most acclaimed academic fine arts museums in the United States, the Davis Museum is a vital force in the intellectual, pedagogical and social life of Wellesley College. It seeks to create an environment that encourages visual literacy, inspires new ideas, and fosters involvement with the arts both within the College and the larger community.

ABOUT WELLESLEY COLLEGE AND THE ARTS

The Wellesley College arts curriculum and the highly acclaimed Davis Museum are integral components of the College’s liberal arts education. Departments and programs from across the campus enliven the community with world-class programming— classical and popular music, visual arts, theatre, dance, author readings, symposia, and lectures by some of today’s leading artists and creative thinkers—most of which are free and open to the public.

Since 1875, Wellesley College has been a leader in providing an excellent liberal arts education for women who will make a difference in the world. Its 500-acre campus near Boston is home to some 2,400 undergraduate students from 49 states and 58 countries.

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High-resolution images of Soft Power Event and ART-LESS available upon request