



at the  
**sasse**  
MUSEUM of ART



# The Sasse Museum of Art: A Community Vision Realized

## A Dream Takes Root

In 2013, commercial, advertising photographer Gene Sasse found himself contemplating the rich artistic heritage of California's Inland Empire. "I realized that the area needed more access to art venues that were easy to get to, free, and family-friendly," he reflected. "I had met dozens of fine artists in the Inland Empire painters, sculptors, printmakers, photographers—whose works were seldom seen."

That moment of insight sparked what Sasse called "the crazy idea of starting a museum" one that would showcase the wealth of artistic talent flourishing in Southern California's Inland Empire, the metropolitan area east of Los Angeles.

## The Birth of IEMA

By 2015, Sasse's vision had taken concrete form as the Inland Empire Museum of Art (IEMA), officially established as a nonprofit art museum. The fledgling institution faced an immediate challenge: finding a permanent home. While the search continued, Sasse's photography studio in Upland became the museum's interim headquarters.

Despite lacking a dedicated building, IEMA quickly developed a distinct identity and mission: to inspire and educate the community by showcasing locally produced art. Sasse and a group of volunteers began curating rotating exhibitions organized around different themes, hosting openings that, while initially small, grew steadily in attendance. "I saw this as a way to inspire and educate, as well as get people to appreciate the wealth of locally produced art being created right in our own backyard," Sasse explained.

## Beyond the Walls

Even without a permanent facility, IEMA's influence spread throughout the region. Sasse and his team took their shows on the road, assembling collections for display at venues across the Inland Empire. The museum's scope



1st Exhibit at Pomona Fairplex | *Inland Expire & Beyond* 2015



*Distinct Perspectives* | Artists from Eastern Europe 2017

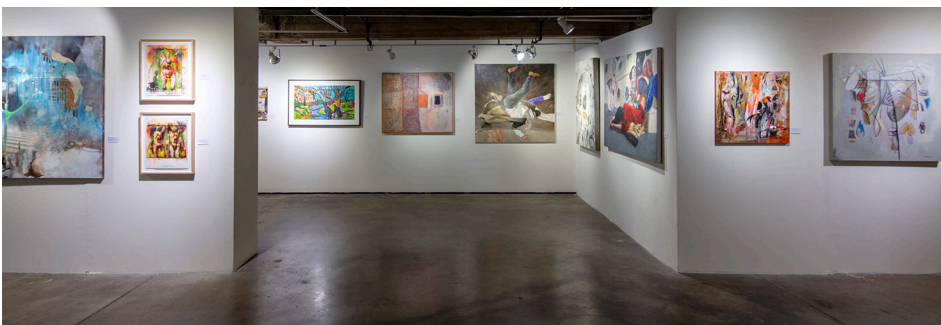




*Moon of Many Petals 2018*



Art-talk with George Cutress & Fr. Bill Moore 2019



*Woven with Hambly & Hambly art gallery in Ireland 2023*

expanded beyond its original focus, incorporating not just contemporary Inland Empire artists but also historical works and other significant art periods.

Education became a cornerstone of IEMA's mission. At the interim location, workshops and classes covered diverse topics from drawing to creative writing. The museum also participated in local school district arts festivals, demonstrating its commitment to arts education.

### **Transformation to the Sasse Museum of Art**

As the institution evolved and its reputation grew, the Inland Empire Museum of Art became the Sasse Museum of Art, acknowledging the founder's pivotal role in establishing this cultural cornerstone. The museum found its permanent home in Upland, California, at 1334 North Benson Avenue.

Under its new identity, the Sasse Museum continued to strengthen its community connections while broadening its digital presence. Gene Sasse's background as a professional photographer proved invaluable as the museum digitized its collections, making exhibits accessible to an international online audience. This digital initiative became foundational to how the museum serves its community.

### **A Living Museum**

Today, the Sasse Museum of Art stands as a testament to one person's vision and the collective effort of countless artists and volunteers. It offers what its leaders describe as "a living, almost organic experience with art." Artists gather at the museum to converse with fellow creators, support each other's work, and engage with Southern California art enthusiasts from experienced collectors to curious newcomers.

The museum's digital presence has become one of its most distinctive features. Collections, presentations, exhibits, and catalogs are offered online, with published catalogs and electronic books available free of



charge, making art accessible far beyond the museum's physical walls.

The essence of this institution lies in its deep connection to the community and commitment to fostering conversations about art and culture. Invested in Southern California art and artists in a way that is diverse, creative, and accessible, the Sasse Museum of Art ensures that everyone who visits has a voice.

### **A Vision Fulfilled**

From a "crazy idea" in a photographer's studio to a vibrant cultural institution, the journey of the Sasse Museum of Art demonstrates how one person's passion can blossom into a gift for an entire community. Through its commitment to "foster and promote the study, appreciation, and understanding of art through exhibits, education, and publications in the Inland Empire," the museum continues to fulfill Gene's original vision serving the community that surrounds it as a destination for creativity and inspiration.

*"The best exhibitions transform the gallery into a landscape of possibility, where each step reveals not just new artworks but new ways of thinking."*



Art Library



*Art of Abstraction: the language of visual poetry 2023*



## Exhibits

Our four exhibit galleries form a space where creative vision flourishes and diverse perspectives find voice offering an artistic space for our community.

We feature artists who might otherwise remain undiscovered by larger institutions. By providing these talents with their first professional platform, we serve as a vital bridge connecting promising artists with appreciative audiences often becoming the crucial first step in remarkable artistic journeys.

The intimate scale of our galleries creates an environment where genuine connection happens. Visitors engage with artwork in spaces designed for contemplation rather than consumption, free from the overwhelming scale and crowds that can characterize major institutions. This intimacy fosters meaningful dialogue between creator, creation, and community.

Our curatorial approach contextualizes each exhibition through thoughtful juxtaposition, revealing subtle relationships between works, movements, and historical periods. This framework helps visitors discover the significance of individual pieces within broader cultural narratives while encouraging personal interpretation.

The Sasse functions as a center for inspiration and reflections place where our community can engage deeply with creative expression. In celebrating artistic vision and innovation, we remain dedicated to creating space where art matters not as a distant cultural monument, but as a living, breathing force that connects us to one another.

*"Art exhibitions remind us that the act of looking closely is itself a creative act —a collaboration between artist, curator, and viewer that breathes new life into every piece."*



*Wild Things* | Marínés Adrianza 2024



*Illuminated* | Cal Art League Juried Exhibit 2024



*Korean Art Palette* | Art in Dongsan 2025



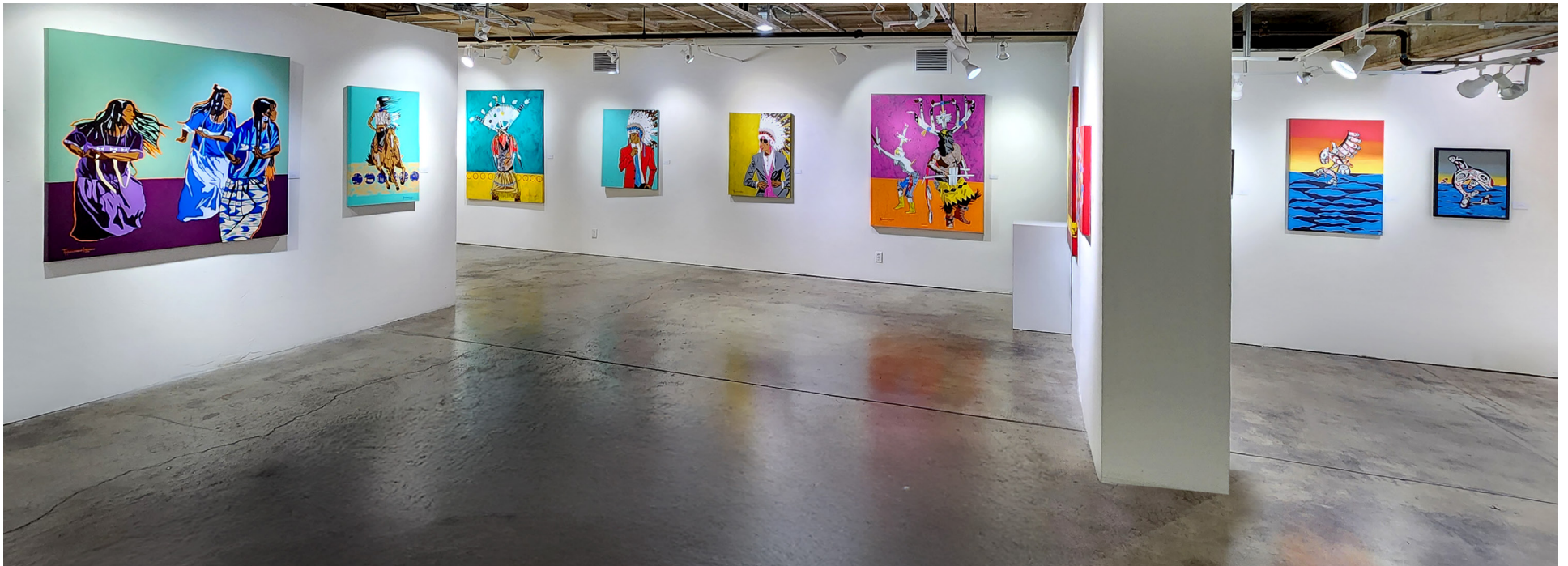
## Native American Projects

We host an annual Native American exhibition, presented either as an online catalog or as a live exhibit at the museum. We feature both emerging talents and established artists. To date, we have produced five catalogs featuring Native American art. Alongside these exhibitions, we have been consistently expanding our permanent collection of Native American art and crafts.

*"A great art exhibition doesn't just display objects; it creates a conversation between the past and present, between the artist and viewer, inviting us to see the world through new eyes."*



Bird Dancers performing at the *Intrinsic: belonging to the land* Reception 2023



*Sustained Resilience* Exhibit 2024





Hawthorne Elementary School- field trip



Art Library

## Education

We serve as a vital resource for creatives at every stage of their journey. Our educational mission stems from the belief that visual arts are fundamental to our lives—functioning as powerful tools to educate youth, enrich cultural life throughout our region and beyond, and cultivate deeper appreciation of art in all its forms. Through thoughtfully curated programs and resources, we inspire, inform, and empower our diverse community.

This year marked significant growth in our educational outreach with field trips hosting 300 students from Hawthorne Elementary School’s 3rd through 6th grade classes, introducing young minds to art’s transformative potential. We strengthened our collegiate partnerships, showcasing promising work from university and college students across multiple exhibitions.

Our meticulously crafted catalogs extend the educational experience beyond museum visits. “Dear Vincent: A Psychologist-Turned-Artist Writes Back to

Van Gogh” offers fresh psychological perspectives on the iconic artist, while “The Nativity Through Art History” examines diverse interpretations across artistic traditions, and “Presidential Portraits” provides historical context through visual leadership representations.

Our art library remains an invaluable community asset, housing over 1,200 books spanning numerous artistic disciplines and movements. This collection supports artists, students, and enthusiasts at every experience level in their creative and scholarly pursuits.



## Collection

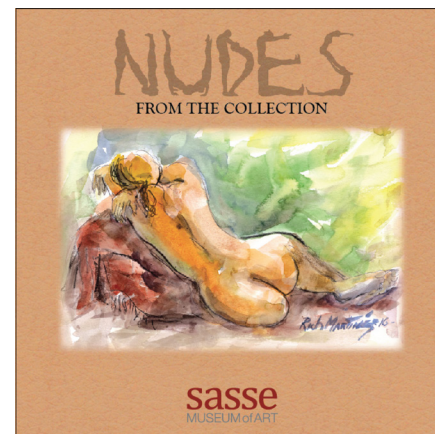
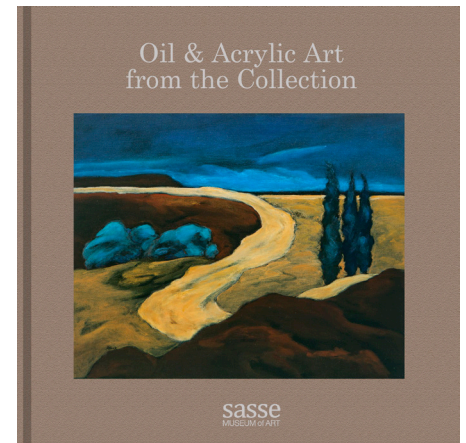
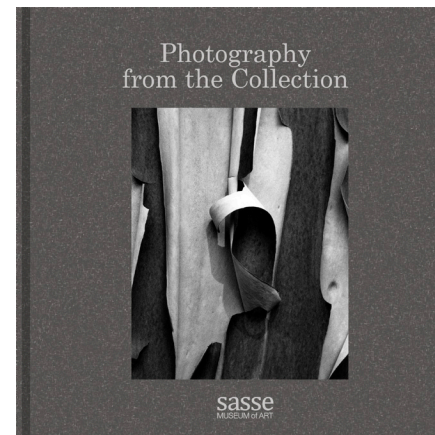
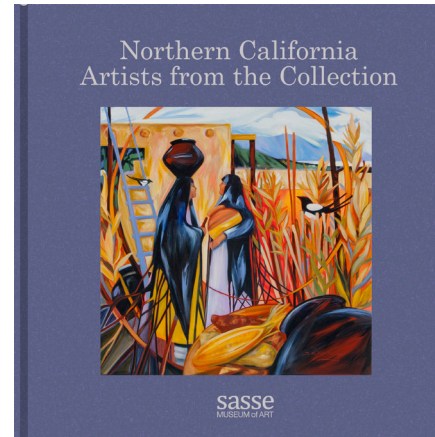
In our relatively short history, the museum has assembled an impressive collection of over 1,700 objects is a testament to the remarkable generosity of our donors and their commitment to making significant artistic works accessible through our non-profit institution.

Our collection balances both quality and scope. We've been privileged to receive donations spanning contemporary abstract works by acclaimed artists such as Fr. Bill Moore, SS.CC. and Roland Reiss, to exceptional photography by Edward Weston and other distinguished photographers. Photography comprises approximately 40% of our collection, representing works from the mid-1800s to the present day.

What distinguishes the Sasse is our forward-thinking curatorial vision. Through our donors' generosity, we've been able to showcase emerging talents at the beginning of their artistic journeys. This approach reflects the educated insight and bold choices of our benefactors, resulting in a collection that features promising artists including Andre Mahoney, Karen Kauffman, and Sumi Foley.

The breadth of our donated collection spans from Ansel Adams to Milford Zornes and encompasses nearly everything in between. Our collection has become a valuable resource for local colleges and universities seeking to curate exhibitions for their galleries evidence of the strong community connections we've fostered and the growing appreciation for the artistic vision our donors have helped us realize.

*"The true power of an art collection lies not in its monetary worth or historical significance, but in its ability to spark unexpected connections and revelations in the minds of those who engage with it."*



Collection Catalogs



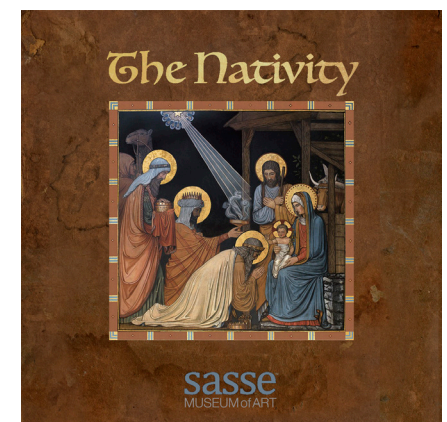
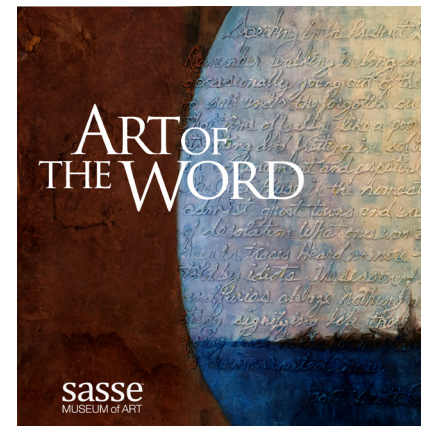
## Books & Catalogs

Reading opens infinite worlds to us, as George R.R. Martin reminds us that “a reader lives a thousand lives before he dies.” This literary journey feeds our creativity, which Einstein beautifully described as “intelligence having fun.” Art becomes our way of sharing these inner worlds, allowing us to, in Degas’s words, make others see what we see. Yet inspiration doesn’t come from waiting—as Picasso knew, “inspiration exists, but it must find you working.”

We have had the opportunity to meet artists and photographers from around the world, and many have been featured in our catalogs, embodying this very principle of creativity in action. While nothing can completely replace the experience of seeing fine art firsthand, traveling to other cities and countries to visit museums in person remains difficult and expensive for most people. Online access opens up the possibility of visiting more museums more frequently, and for many, it represents the only viable option. The public has also shown increased interest in viewing art through digital platforms, demonstrating how technology can bridge the gap between inspiration and accessibility.

We currently feature 46 catalogs on our website, with new additions each year. Our collection includes theme-based catalogs, artist spotlights, and subject-focused publications. With our newsletter reaching readers in almost 50 countries, we maintain a substantial international audience despite being a small museum. Selected catalogs are available in our gift store, and we have expanded our reach by publishing catalogs on Amazon. Whether we’re turning pages of our publications, viewing digital exhibitions, wielding brushes, crafting words, or pursuing any creative endeavor, we’re part of an endless cycle where reading nourishes imagination, imagination births art, art sparks creativity in others, and the whole beautiful process continues.

Maya Angelou captured this perfectly: “You can’t use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have.”





# Thoughts About the Sasse

*The museum's distinctive basement location in Pomona's historic Progress Building provides an intimate setting where visitors can experience art through both physical exhibitions and globally accessible digital platforms, creating a museum experience that transcends traditional boundaries of pace and accessibility.*

**Anonymous**

*Supporting the Sasse Museum of Art means supporting a more inclusive and vibrant cultural landscape. It is more than a museum it is a community driven institution committed to enriching lives through the arts.*

**Mandi Batalo, Ed.D.**

Art Department Chair/Professor  
San Bernardino Valley College

*The Sasse nurtures and oxygenates the whole creative ecosystem - Artists, the public, museums, galleries - all benefit from this labor of love.*

**Kati Thomson**

Artists/Clovis

*For the last decade the Sasse has modestly, consistently offered the spectator an uplifting visual experience, one that reconnects with universal truth, personal vision, the value of community, of different cultures, of recognition, respect for tradition in a modern context....*

**Deenagh Miller**

English Artists living in Italy

*As an artist museum shows are a vital part of my art practice. To have had the opportunity to exhibit at the Sasse Museum was a wonderful opportunity. In my opinion this is one of the outstanding ventures in the USA I am honored to have shown there.*

**Eamon Colman**

Irish Artist

*The library area really captures what I feel makes this place special - it's welcoming, family-friendly, and deeply rooted in community. This is a place where I actually want to linger and find myself returning to again and again.*

**Yuntong "Momo" Wu**

Artist/Curator

*As an artist and curator, I've had the pleasure of collaborating with Sasse Museum on three international exhibitions to date. Each project has been met with professionalism, openness, and a sincere enthusiasm for cross-cultural exchange.*

**Shuai Xu**

*From its outset, the Sasse has championed and given voice to local artists in and around Southern California. Rather than focusing upon one set of notables and their students, the Sasse casts a wider, more inclusive net.*

**Kendall Johnson Ph.D.**

*I had the chance to visit the Gresham Gallery at San Bernardino Valley college and take in the impressive Sasse Collection of fine photography. The collection is impressive in both its scale and the quality of the images.*

**Mark Watkins**

Retired Instructor /Yucaipa High School



Phoenix TV & Sing Tao Daily, interviewing artist Lili Wang  
at Visual Language of Modernity exhibit 2025



## Join Our Family: Building Community Through Art

In our short time since opening, we've accomplished remarkable things together. Thanks to donors, artists, and art lovers like you, we've built more than a museum we've created a vital community resource that serves local schools and enriches countless lives.

Art serves as a powerful vehicle of hope, illuminating pathways to a brighter future. It carries messages of inspiration and creates bridges between people from all walks of life, helping us discover our shared interests.

### Your Support Makes the Difference

We invite you to become a monthly donor with a recurring contribution of your choosing. Every individual gift contributes to our collective strength; quite simply, we wouldn't exist without supporters like you. Your financial contribution becomes part of our shared future.

Supporting the Sasse isn't merely philanthropy, it's an investment in our community, you ensure that art remains accessible to everyone, that histories are preserved rather than forgotten, and that future generations inherit not just artifacts, but the context and wisdom they contain. In a world increasingly driven by immediate returns, the Sasse reminds us that some values, beauty, truth, cultural identity—transcend the marketplace yet require our tangible commitment to survive.

**Follow us on Instagram**

@sasseartmuseum



Rebecca Hamm installing art for her  
*Signal Interference* exhibit 2024



Sihyeon Park: *Vujà dé*" exhibit 2024



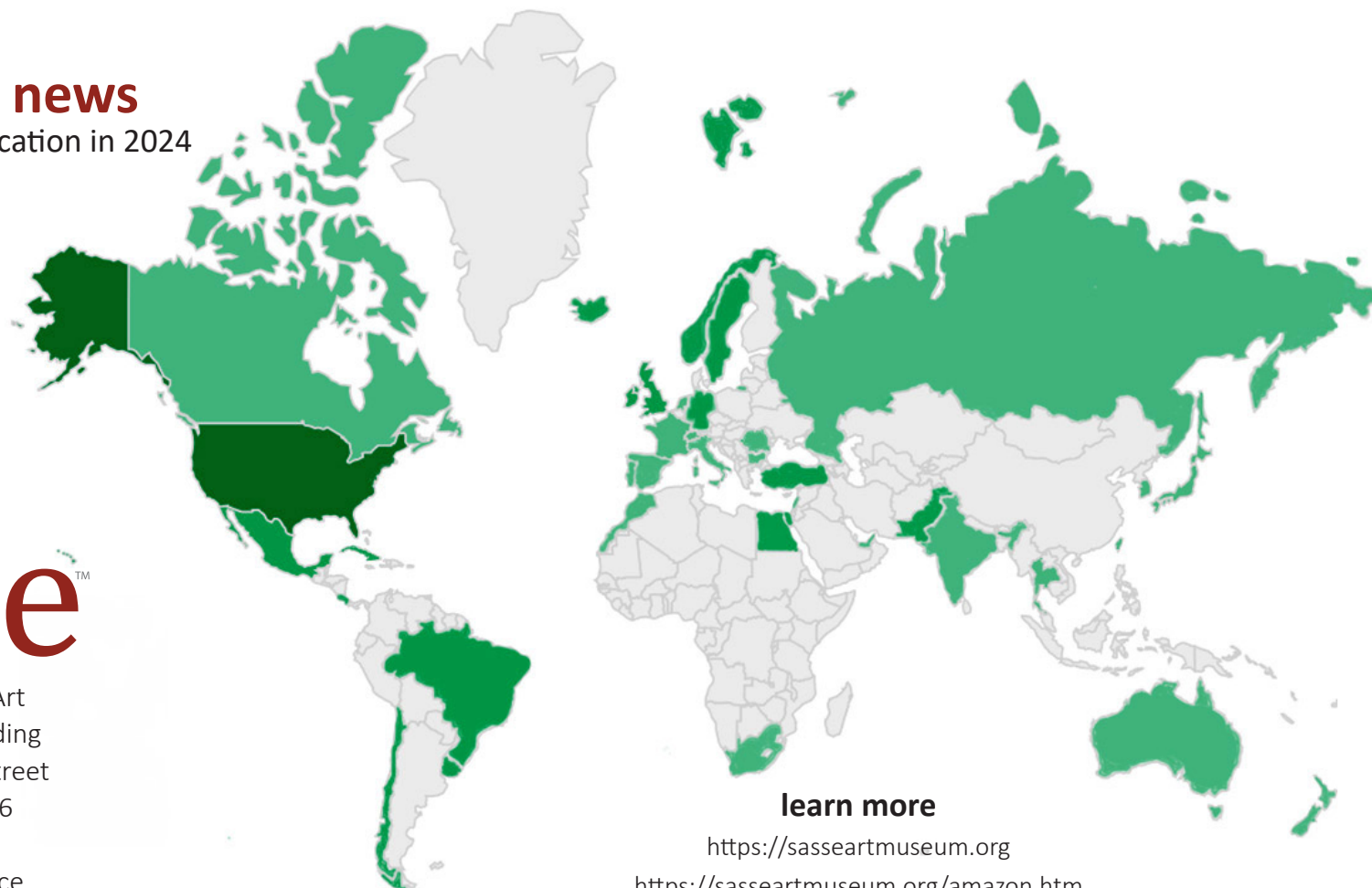
**sasse news**  
opened by location in 2024

**sasse**<sup>TM</sup>

Sasse Museum of Art  
In The Progress Building  
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Pomona, CA 91766

Administrative Office  
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Upland, CA 91786

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