

New gifts to the Block Museum highlighted in fall exhibitions



Purvis Young, "Landscape with Figures," ca. 1990, Block Museum of Art Northwestern University, gift of Selig D. Sacks Family Collection

EVANSTON --- The Block Museum of Art at Northwestern University will present two exhibitions that highlight recent gifts of contemporary art to its permanent collection.

"Carrie Mae Weems: Ritual and Revolution," an immersive, gallery-sized installation by artist Carrie Mae Weems, opens Sept. 12, and "Looking Life Right Straight in the Face," an exhibition of paintings by self-trained artist Purvis Young, opens Sept. 23.

In recent years, the Block has increased the diversity of media and broadened the array of artists represented in its collection, welcoming gifts that demonstrate global perspectives, that foster respect for diversity and differences and complement areas of Northwestern's curriculum.

The two exhibitions will run concurrently with the Block's major fall exhibition, "William Blake and the Age of Aquarius," (Sept. 23, 2017 to March 11, 2018) at the Block Museum, 40 Arts Circle Drive on the Evanston campus.

"Gifts to the Block Museum of Art become the cornerstones of exhibitions that showcase new ways of looking at the world. We are proud to be able to mount exhibitions with deep resonance to issues in contemporary life and with through lines to curriculum across the campus. We are grateful to Peter Norton and to the Selig D. Sacks Family for the gifts that enabled these shows and for their recognition of the Block as an institution that fosters valuable teaching and learning experiences around works of contemporary art," said Lisa Corrin, the Block Museum's Ellen Philips Katz Director.

About the fall exhibitions:

Carrie Mae Weems: Ritual and Revolution

Sept. 12 to Dec. 10

A practicing artist since 1978, Carrie Mae Weems (b. 1953) often creates works that blur the lines between fiction and documentary to explore universal human experiences through the black subject. Over the years, Weems' photographic practice has expanded to include video, performance and multi-media installations. "Ritual and Revolution" (1998) marks one of the artist's earliest forays into three dimensions. Composed of diaphanous printed cloth banners organized in a semi-architectural formation and a poetic audio track, "Ritual and Revolution" explores the historic human struggle for equality and justice. Carrie Mae Weems' work has been exhibited nationally and internationally since the 1980s and was the subject of a traveling mid-career retrospective mounted at New York's Guggenheim Museum. She has received numerous awards and fellowships including a MacArthur "Genius" award in 2013. The Block is presenting this work for the first time since it entered the museum's collection.

A limited-edition work, "Ritual and Revolution" is part of the 68 works of contemporary art donated to the Block Museum in 2016 by art collector, philanthropist and software innovator Peter Norton. The Block gift is one of a series of gifts Norton has made to university art museums throughout the country. The gifts recognize and support institutions integrating art into teaching and learning across disciplines, fostering creative museum practices and engaging audiences with diverse forms of contemporary art.

"Carrie Mae Weems: Ritual and Revolution" is curated by Janet Dees, the Block Museum Steven and Lisa Munster Tananbaum Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art.

Related Event:

"Ritual and Revolution" will be the subject of a Sept. 27, 6 p.m. gallery talk between Dees and Grace Deveney, Curatorial Assistant, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago and a Northwestern Ph.D. Candidate in Art History. Online reservations are requested.

The installation also will be discussed within a panel of national scholars during the Northwestern University Black Arts Initiative "Temporalities & Territories Conference", Oct. 9 to 14. Admission is free and open to the public.

"Looking Life Right Straight in the Face": The Art of Purvis Young

Sept. 23 to Dec. 10

This exhibition of paintings and drawings by the self-trained artist Purvis Young (1943-2010), features works that were a recent gift to the Block Museum by board of advisors member Selig Sacks and his wife, Angela Himsel, as well as key loans that represent themes that absorbed Young throughout his career. In addition to his leadership within the Block Museum, Sacks serves as co-chair of the Contemporary Center Steering Committee of the American Folk Art Museum.

For much of his life, Young lived and worked in the Overtown section of Miami. His paintings, rendered in ink or paint on found materials ranging from scrap lumber, manila folders and wallpaper books, center on a small, repeating group of images. Young's observations of Overtown life mirrored major social changes taking place in the world beyond his neighborhood, including the migration of "boat people" from Haiti and Cuba and the struggles and hopes of immigrants. His work is a testament to his extraordinary capacity for, as he put it, "looking life right straight in its face."

"Looking Life Right Straight in the Face: The Art of Purvis Young" is curated by Block Museum curatorial assistant Julia Poppy (WCAS '17), a recent graduate from Northwestern's department of art history. The exhibition continues the Block's commitment to supporting the original scholarship of Northwestern students related to the Block's collection and offering them opportunities to present their ideas to the public through exhibitions.

Related Event:

"Looking Life Right Straight in the Face" will be the subject of an Oct. 19 conversation between Lisa Corrin, the Block Museum Ellen Philips Katz Director and Debra Kerr, the Director of Intuit: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art. Online reservations are requested.

About the Block Museum:

Northwestern University's Block Museum of Art is a dynamic, imaginative and innovative teaching and learning resource for the University and its surrounding communities, featuring a global exhibition program that crosses time periods and cultures and serves as a springboard for thought-provoking discussions relevant to our lives today. The museum also commissions new work by artists to foster connections between artists and the public through the creative process. Each year, the Block mounts exhibitions; organizes and hosts lectures, symposia and workshops involving artists, scholars, curators and critics; and screens classic and contemporary films at its in-house cinema.

Museum hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays, Saturdays and Sundays and 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. The Museum is closed Mondays. Admission is free and open to the public.

Block Museum parking is available in the Segal Visitors Center garage and the two-level lakeside lot directly south of the museum and is free of charge on weekends and after 4 p.m. on weekdays. For more information, visit the Block Museum website.

The Block Museum of Art is a member of the Northwestern Arts Circle, which brings together film, humanities, literary arts, music, theater, dance and visual arts.