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SAMANTHA TOPOL JOINS THE BLOCK MUSEUM TO SUPPORT ENGAGEMENT AND DONOR RELATIONS

The Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art at Northwestern University is pleased to announce the appointment of Samantha Topol as Manager of Grants and Donor Engagement. In addition to building the museum's relationships with foundations, Topol will work in close collaboration with the museum's new engagement department, designing programs that broaden the museum's network and activate its current base of supporters. This newly-defined role reflects The Block Museum's expanded vision of museum engagement and interest in building greater connection among all of its stakeholders.

Topol brings to the Block Museum a rich and diverse skill set, including 10 years as a writer, editor and programmer, as well as significant fundraising and project management expertise. Recently, for example, Topol developed and directed the summer 2013 programs for *Spontaneous Interventions* at the Chicago Cultural Center, and coordinated the exhibition's Chicago reinstallation after its debut in Venice, where it was the official US representation at the 2012 Venice Architecture Biennial. Her contributions as a writer and editor in the field include essays on contemporary art, architecture and design in *Theorizing Visual Studies*, *Art Lies*, *The Believer*, and *The Architect's Newspaper*, as well as editorial management of numerous exhibition catalogues and the website redesign of the internationally recognized magazine, *Domus*. A dual degree holder from the School of the Art Institute, Topol lends an in-depth knowledge of the Chicago area arts and cultural landscape to this position, integrated with an investment in the role of institutions in creating a vibrant arts ecology in the city.

Lisa Corrin, the Block's Ellen Philips Katz Director, states, "Sam has a strong background as a writer and as a programmer--the perfect combination for her new position. She also knows the Chicago art scene. Most important, she is passionate about connecting art and people and brings creativity and a lively intelligence to everything she does. We are all looking forward to the new energy she will bring to our donor engagement programming."

As a staff member at The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, where she was Development Associate and grant writer for three years, Topol successfully identified and cultivated new grants and reestablished previous sources of funding. Following her tenure at The Society, Topol continued to consult on fundraising with a range of Chicago-based arts and culture nonprofits, ultimately earning her clients first-time support from such grantmakers as The MacArthur Foundation, The Driehaus Foundation, and The Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation. Susanne Ghez, former director of the Renaissance Society and an adjunct curator in the Department of Contemporary Art at the Art Institute of Chicago, describes Sam as "among the best and the brightest of the younger generation in Chicago's cultural community." "Clearly since Lisa Corrin's arrival two years ago, she has been building a very strong staff to move the Block forward," says Ghez. "With Sam's skills, connections, knowledge of contemporary art, and background in art history, she is going to be an outstanding addition to the museum."

Topol is joining an expanded staff at the Block, including the recent arrivals of Kathleen Bickford Berzock, Associate Director of Curatorial Affairs, formerly of the Art Institute, and Susy Bielak, Associate Director of Engagement and Curator of Public Practice, formerly of the Walker Art Center.

"Now is an exciting time at the Block Museum," says Topol. "Under Lisa Corrin's leadership, there is an invigorating direction for the museum in the coming years. The Block Museum has so much to offer the Northwestern and Chicago communities, and together with my colleague Susy Bielak, I am particularly

looking forward to developing forums for people to connect to the museum in ways that excite their interest and imagination.”

Bielak shares, “The Block is currently asking how we can serve campus and community audiences as a teaching museum, a site of scholarship and experimentation, and a convener for interdisciplinary conversations using art as a jumping off point. We’re thrilled to have Sam on board to join us in answering these questions.”