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FOR RELEASE: December 11, 2013

BLOCK MUSEUM NAMES FIRST ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF CURATORIAL AFFAIRS
Curator Kathleen Bickford Berzock will join the Block from the Art Institute of Chicago

EVANSTON, Ill. --- The Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art at Northwestern University is pleased to announce that Kathleen Bickford Berzock, curator of African art at the Art Institute of Chicago, has accepted the position of associate director of curatorial affairs.

Berzock will assume her new role at the Block on Jan. 20, 2014. Berzock will play a leading role in making the Block a dynamic site for exhibitions that look broadly at the visual arts across cultures and time periods and that draw on the unique resources of Northwestern University, including its collections, faculty and students.

Berzock says she is excited to be joining the Block Museum and Northwestern University. "The Block Museum is poised to play a major role as an ambassador for groundbreaking research and as a laboratory for the innovative work of its faculty and students. I bring the skills of an experienced museum professional and as an Africanist art historian to my new role at the Block, coupled with an openness to multiple perspectives and diverse voices that will enrich the Block's approach to presenting art from around the world."

Lisa Corrin, the Block's Ellen Philips Katz Director, states, "Dr. Berzock will have a critical role in shaping the artistic program of the museum, advancing its new emphasis on a global perspective that considers the relations between art and cultures cross-historically. Her presence will also enable the Block to contribute to Northwestern's significant legacy of scholarship in the field of African history grounded in research through its extraordinary Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies. Her international experience, strong commitment to collaboration and willingness to turn our galleries into a place for fresh, interdisciplinary thinking about art and ideas will set a new standard for the Block's programming. Known for her thoughtfulness and integrity, she will be a tremendous mentor to our students."

In her 18 years at the Art Institute, Berzock guided the development and display of the museum's African art collection. She has been responsible for the acquisition of major iconic works that have built on the collection's strengths as well as broadened its scope, including significant purchases of work from Ethiopia and Morocco. In 2011, she conceived, developed and implemented the new and greatly expanded permanent collection gallery for African art, bringing the collection to life by spearheading an innovative collaboration that produced three short films to contextualize the works on view more fully.

Berzock has presented internationally acclaimed exhibitions at the Art Institute, including the groundbreaking "Benin-Kings and Rituals: Court Arts from Nigeria" (2008), which set the museum's record for attendance of an African art exhibition; "Masterpieces from Central Africa: Selections from the Belgian Royal Museum of Central Africa, Tervuren" (1999); and "Baule: African Art/Western Eyes" (1998). In 2005, she curated and wrote the scholarly catalogue for the exhibition "For Hearth and Altar: African Ceramics from the Keith Achepohl Collection," which highlighted the ceramic arts of the African continent

and celebrated the gift of 75 ceramic works to the museum's collection. She has also curated exhibitions of work from the museum's permanent collection, including "African Artistry: Gifts from the Faletti Family Collection" (2003); "The Miracles of Mary: A Seventeenth Century Ethiopian Manuscript" (2002) and "Yoruba Masquerade" (1999).

In 2010, her book "Representing Africa in American Art Museums: A Century of Collecting and Display," which she conceived and co-edited with Christa Clarke of the Newark Museum, was published by University of Washington Press. In its 13 essays, the publication chronicles more than a century of building and presenting collections of African art in this country, including at the Art Institute of Chicago. It also explores shifts in meaning and the public perception of African art.

Prior to moving to Chicago, Berzock was research assistant for African art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1993–1995), and she has served as adjunct curator to the Milwaukee Art Museum (2000) and the Indianapolis Art Museum (1989). She received her Ph.D. in African art history from Indiana University. Her dissertation on factory-printed textiles in Côte d'Ivoire has served as the springboard for articles in several journals and a catalogue essay for the University of Missouri–Kansas City Art Gallery (1997).

Last year, Berzock was named a Fellow at the prestigious Center for Curatorial Leadership (CCL), and was awarded a residency at the British Museum in London. In reflecting on Berzock's new appointment, Douglas Druick, president and Eloise W. Martin Director of the Art Institute of Chicago, stated, "While we are very sorry to see Kathleen leave the museum after nearly two decades of inspired curatorial endeavor, we are also heartened that her experience here and her professional development with the CCL are enabling her to move into a leadership position at another Chicago institution that will benefit greatly from her creativity, initiative and collegiality."

At the Art Institute, Berzock worked closely for nearly two decades with Richard Townsend, chair of the department of African art and Indian art of the Americas. Townsend has remarked, "She leaves the Art Institute with lively new African galleries, an expanded collection of international standing and the example of ambitious exhibitions that have broadened our awareness of the breadth of African art and culture. Kathleen has notably attracted a wide and diverse public to African art, effectively asserting the role of the museum in acquiring and exhibiting the great range of African traditions. We are very proud of her singular contributions to the life of our city, region and nation, as well as to the international community. We wish Kathleen every success in her new assignment and extend to her our heartfelt thanks for the contributions that have so enriched us during her years as curator of African art at the Art Institute of Chicago."

Her longtime colleague Kate Ezra, the Nolen Curator of Education and Academic Affairs at the Yale University Art Gallery, says Berzock has made substantial contributions to the field of African art and the way that museums have shaped our understanding of it. "As associate director of curatorial affairs at the Block Museum, Kathleen will bring her unique perspective as an Africanist, which rather than restrict her focus has given her a broad understanding of the importance of global connections throughout history and in the contemporary world," Ezra said.

For more information about the Block Museum, visit www.blockmuseum.northwestern.edu.