

EVANSTON

EVANSTON'S MEANINGFUL PURSUITS

Magazine

"Talent is an accident of genes, and a responsibility."

—ALAN RICKMAN

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JEREMY PIVEN
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BY THE BLOCK

Northwestern University's campus houses an innovative art museum that's expanding its reach and reputation to global levels.

WORDS BY ELIZABETH HOPE

Name a museum with exhibitions and events on par with those that you'd find at the Art Institute of Chicago or the Museum of Contemporary Art, but it's free every day and open to everyone. Another clue: it's on the campus of Northwestern University.

If you guessed the Block Museum of Art, you're right. And if you didn't guess it, then you need to visit this campus museum featuring regional and national art on caliber with what you see in the city's best museums. The Block's recent exhibitions have been reviewed in *The New York Times*, *Financial Times*, and *The New Yorker*, and with three gallery spaces that are always rotating, you're guaranteed to see something new on almost any visit.

One of the things the Block staff is most proud of is the breadth and depth of the offerings, says Lisa Corrin, the Block's Ellen Philips Katz Director (a position endowed by Katz, a Northwestern University trustee and Block board member).

"We're global in scope," notes Corrin. "The museum presents art from across time and cultures. Our exhibitions raise questions about history as well as about our world today. We want the experience of art to be a springboard for conversations

about ideas and issues relevant to our lives."

The Block collaborates with museums nationally and internationally. Its program includes traveling exhibitions from major institutions and exhibitions curated by the Block team and sometimes Northwestern faculty or students. With an emphasis on new ways of looking and thinking about art and human experience, the Block is gaining a reputation for innovative approaches to exhibition making and for its contributions to scholarship. Block exhibitions travel to other museums in the US and abroad where these fresh perspectives can be shared with audiences beyond Chicagoland.

Several recent exhibitions have featured art reflecting on social justice. The current exhibition, "If You Remember, I'll Remember," includes the work of seven artists, who touch on themes of love, mourning, war, relocation, internment, resistance, and civil rights in American history.

The artworks include archival materials that reveal past struggles for equal rights and reflect on current events. "If You Remember, I'll Remember" juxtaposes themes and histories that are rarely considered in relationship to each other," the exhibition description reads. "Together these works pose questions about the purposes and processes of remembering and the responsibilities of those who remember."

The Block Museum is particularly dedicated to hosting conversations and participatory events that bring the campus and community together and expand on the concepts and themes found in the artwork. In fact, four years ago, the museum created an engagement department dedicated to partnerships and collaboration.

To kick off the "If You Remember, I'll Remember" exhibition, the museum organized a sewing circle with one of the featured artists, Marie Watt, and many campus and community partners. Over 200 local participants came together to sew swatches of fabric with words of empowerment from which the artist will create a blanket, inspired by her Seneca heritage.

"People were hungry to participate directly in the act of creation," Susy Bielak, associate director of engagement and curator of public practice says, "and the act of bringing people together helped foster conversation about both the exhibition and issues affecting communities in Evanston, Chicago, and beyond.

"There are moments almost weekly at the Block to join with others and think about what is happening in the world," Bielak adds. "We're hoping to create inspiring events. While we still offer more traditional opportunities for learning—like lectures and formal presentations by artists and scholars, much of what we do also fosters shared experiences."

With so much emphasis on connecting art to life, perhaps the best way to think about the dynamic identity of the Block today is, as both a place and a state of mind.

"When you visit the Block," Corrin states, "we hope you will have experiences of human creativity that change the way you think. After all we are a campus art museum, and isn't that the mission of a university?"

The Mary & Leigh Block Museum of Art is located on the campus of Northwestern University at 40 Arts Circle Drive in Evanston. The museum is always free, and it's closed on Mondays. Parking is free after 4 p.m. and all day on weekends in the nearby Segal Visitors Center garage. To learn more, visit blockmuseum.northwestern.edu, or call 847-491-4000.



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