



Paul Chan, *Happiness (finally) after 35,000 years of civilization* (detail), courtesy of the artist and Greene Naftali Gallery

Block Museum of Art presents Paul Chan's *Happiness (finally) after 35,000 years of civilization*

Media artwork exploring philosophy, pop culture, and war
on view July 17 – November 4, 2018

The Block Museum of Art at Northwestern University announces a new exhibition highlighting a significant gift of media art to its permanent collection. Beginning July 17, the Block Museum devotes its first-floor gallery to the media work *Happiness (finally) after 35,000 years of civilization* by contemporary artist Paul Chan.

Paul Chan (b. 1973) is an American artist, activist, writer, and publisher. His work addresses relationships between politics and aesthetics, philosophy and popular culture, and art and grassroots activism. These concerns figure prominently in *Happiness (finally) after 35,000 years of civilization*, Chan's first major artwork, which was started in 1999 and completed in 2003. A 17-minute looped Flash animation, *Happiness* is inspired as much by the history of utopian thought and the US invasion of Iraq as by Web 1.0 banner ads.

"The Block Museum is dedicated to exploring the methods of artistic processes, inquiry, and innovation," notes Lisa Corrin, Block Museum Ellen Philips Katz Director. "It's for this reason that we are thrilled to own and exhibit *Happiness*, one of Paul Chan's earliest and most formative works. This bold animation introduces themes that Chan has continued to mine and expand throughout his renowned career."



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Completed as part of his MFA degree at Bard College, *Happiness* also reflects Chan's formative undergraduate years at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he first encountered the work of Chicago-based self-taught artist Henry Darger. Darger's beautiful and violent imagery runs throughout *Happiness*, which also draws on the ideas of the radical 19th-century French socialist Charles Fourier.

Chan animates these sources across an ultra wide screen, depicting cycles of ecstasy and carnage, and hope and despair. While the work evokes optimism about the expressive and collaborative possibilities of new digital technologies, its avatars of militarism and greed also respond obliquely to the political anxieties of the first George W. Bush administration.

"While Paul Chan is internationally recognized, he traces the roots of his artistic education to the School of the Art Institute Chicago. During this year of Art Design Chicago, when the city celebrates its place as a unique incubator of artistic talent, we are glad to take a renewed look at this artwork that was inspired by his education here." says co-curator James Hodge, Northwestern assistant professor of English and the Alice Kaplan Institute for the Humanities.

A limited-edition work, *Happiness* is part of a gift of 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.

"*Happiness* is a visionary work of 21st-century digital art," says Michael Metzger, the Block Museum's Pick-Laudati Curator of Media Arts and exhibition co-curator. "It's a perfect manifestation of the Block's mission to collect and exhibit uncompromising, innovative, and historically significant works of new media."

About Paul Chan

Paul Chan was born in 1973 in Hong Kong and raised in Omaha, Nebraska. He received a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1996 and an MFA from Bard College in 2002. Solo exhibitions and screenings of Chan's work have been organized by MOMA Film at the Gramercy Theater in New York (2003), the Hammer Museum of the University of California in Los Angeles (2005), Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston (2005), Blanton Museum of Art in Austin (2006), Portikus in Frankfurt (2006), Serpentine Gallery in London (2007), and Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam (2007). His work has also been included in major group exhibitions such as the Carnegie International (2004), Lyon Biennale (2005), Whitney Biennial (2006), Istanbul Biennial (2007), *Art in America: 300 Years of Innovation* at the Shanghai Museum of Contemporary Art organized by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (2007), Sydney Biennial (2008), and Venice Biennale (2009). Among several honors awarded to Chan are a National Endowment for the Arts Development Fellowship from the College Art Association (2001), Lower East Side Printshop Van Lier Fellowship from The Andy Warhol Foundation (2001), and a Rockefeller Foundation new media arts fellowship (2003). He was the winner of the 2014 Hugo Boss Prize, and his solo exhibition *The Hugo Boss Prize 2014: Paul Chan, Nonprojections for New Lovers* was presented at the Guggenheim Museum in 2015. Chan lives and works in New York.

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 art