



Block Museum of Art Receives \$350K in NEH Support for Touring Exhibition “Caravans of Gold”

The Block Museum of Art at Northwestern University is the recipient of a major exhibition implementation grant of \$350,000 from the National Endowment for Humanities. The grant supports the exhibition *Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time: Art, Culture, and Exchange across Medieval Saharan Africa* opening at The Block Museum in January 2019 before traveling to the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto (Fall 2019) and the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African Art, in Washington DC (Spring 2020).

The Block Museum grant is one of only ten museum implementation grants offered by the NEH during this funding round, and one of eleven grants to Illinois institutions. The NEH focuses its financial support on projects that deepen public understanding of significant humanities ideas and topics.

Caravans of Gold, the first major art exhibition to address the global reach of West Africa in the medieval period, opens at the Block Museum of Art at Northwestern University on January 26, 2019. The exhibition highlights a time when West African gold fueled a far-reaching economy and Saharan exchange served as a crossroads

for art, people, and ideas, linking West Africa to North Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and beyond. *Caravans of Gold* presents more than 250 artworks and fragments spanning types, styles, and religious practices, across five centuries and a vast geographic expanse. The exhibition features rare loans from partner museums and institutions in Mali, Morocco, and Nigeria, many of which have never before been presented in the United States. The accompanying catalog, co-published by Princeton University Press, is designed to serve as a comprehensive new resource on the subject.

Eight years in planning, *Caravans of Gold* is curated by Kathleen Bickford Berzock, Associate Director of Curatorial Affairs at the Block Museum with support from an interdisciplinary team of specialists from art history, archaeology, history, and comparative literature working in Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, and Europe who serve as advisors to the project.

“The National Endowment for the Humanities is one of the highest platforms for the advancement of groundbreaking scholarship and cultural work. We are deeply grateful to the NEH for their support in presenting this ambitious, interdisciplinary exhibition that places Africa at the center of a global historical narrative and invites American audiences to rethink Africa’s vital presence in world history. This grant underscores the importance of this story to audiences on a national level,” says Lisa Graziose Corrin, Block Museum of Art Ellen Philips Katz Director.

The Block Museum grant is one of \$43.1 million in awards for 218 humanities projects across the country, announced by the NEH on August 8th, 2018. This round of funding, NEH’s third and last for fiscal year 2018, will support vital research, education, preservation, and public programs in the humanities. These peer-reviewed grants were awarded in addition to \$47 million in annual operating support provided to the national network of state and local humanities councils during fiscal year 2018.



Left: Virgin and Child, ca. 1275–1300, France, Ivory with paint, 36.8 × 16.5 × 12.7 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917, 17.190.295; **Center:** Kneeling Figure Natamatao, Mopti region, Mali, 10th – 14th century, Terracotta, 46 cm x 22.3 cm x 21.5 cm, Musée national du Mali, Photograph by Seydou Camara, 90-25-10; **Right:** Seated Figure, Possibly Ife, Tada Nigeria, Late 13th-14th century, Copper with traces of arsenic, lead, and tin, H. 54 cm, Nigerian National Commission for Museums and Monuments, 79.R18.

“The projects receiving funding strengthen and sustain the cultural life of our nation and its citizens,” said NEH Chairman Jon Parrish Peede.

In 2016 the National Endowment for Humanities awarded the Block Museum a \$60,000 planning grant for *Caravans of Gold*. Additional generous exhibition support has been provided by the Northwestern University Buffett Institute for Global Studies, the Alumnae of Northwestern University, the Robert Lehman Foundation, the Elizabeth F. Cheney Foundation, and the Evanston Arts Council, an agency supported by the City of Evanston. The related publication is supported in part by Northwestern University’s Office for Research, Furthermore: a program of the J.M. Kaplan Fund, the Sandra L. Riggs Publications Fund at the Block Museum of Art, and a gift from Liz Warnock to the Department of Art History at Northwestern University. Special thanks to the Art Institute of Chicago for curatorial research support.

About the National Endowment for the Humanities

Created in 1965 as an independent federal agency, the National Endowment for the Humanities supports research and learning in history, literature, philosophy, and other areas of the humanities by funding selected, peer-reviewed proposals from around the nation. Additional information about the National Endowment for the Humanities and its grant programs is available at: www.neh.gov.



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