

DIGITAL IMAGES AVAILABLE -- [DOWNLOAD HERE](#)

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY NEWS

MEDIA CONTACT: Judy Moore at 847-491-4819 or jkm229@northwestern.edu

FOR RELEASE: March 19, 2015

BLOCK'S 'THE LAST SUPPER' RAISES QUESTIONS OF RACE, CLASS AND JUSTICE
Contemporary artist Julie Green's work depicts last meal requests of U.S. death row inmates

- 600 plates depicting death row inmates' last meal requests to fill Block's main gallery
- Exhibition examines pressing questions of prisoners' last wishes, loss and justice
- Block to host wide-ranging discussions on capital punishment and criminal and social justice
- Key partner Northwestern Law played crucial role in eradicating Illinois death penalty

EVANSTON, Ill. --- One inmate requested only a can of Coke with a cigarette. Another asked for his mother's ravioli and chicken dumplings. Yet another ordered pork chops, eggs, toast, cherry pie, butter pecan ice cream, orange juice and milk.

These are death row inmates' last meal requests, all part of a spring 2015 exhibition presented by Northwestern University's [Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art](#), which through these meals examines capital punishment and free will.

"The Last Supper: 600 Plates Illustrating Final Meals of U.S. Death Row Inmates," an installation by contemporary artist [Julie Green](#), features 600 white ceramic plates decorated with cobalt blue mineral paint to depict the last meal requests of U.S. death row inmates. It opens May 9 and will remain on view to the public through Aug. 9. The Block Museum is located at 40 Arts Circle Drive on Northwestern University's Evanston campus.

Funding for the project has been generously provided by Chicago artist Angela Lustig and Northwestern alumnus Dale E. Taylor. Taylor is the president and CEO of AbelsonTaylor.

"The Last Supper" exhibition

Every plate in "The Last Supper" is accompanied by a description of the meal request, date and state -- but no more. Without naming the inmate or crime, the meals highlight the human dimension of capital punishment. The plates function as anonymous portraits that when grouped together suggest a memorial to lost life on a mass scale.

Julie Green, professor of art at Oregon State University, has been painting plates for 15 years and is committed to creating 50 each year until capital punishment is abolished.

"After reading about a final meal in the newspaper in 1998, I wondered why we have this ritual and what specific foods might reveal about the person making the selection," Green said. "Painting can be a meditation, a time to reflect. The meals are so personal, and, for me, they humanize death row. As a kid living in Chicago I shared my family's support of Nixon and capital punishment. Now I don't. And neither does my mother. I like to say if you can change your mom, you can change the world."

Green's Block Museum exhibition has particular salience at Northwestern, as the Northwestern University School of Law was influential in the eradication of the death penalty in Illinois. The Block is partnering with the School of Law, among others, to address issues raised by the exhibition.

Block programs prompt dialogue on capital punishment and criminal justice

In [a recent interview with PBS NewsHour](#), Green described her goal with "The Last Supper" as "to be part of the conversation of capital punishment." The Block Museum has organized a schedule of spring programs that invite thoughtful contemplation of the criminal justice system, capital punishment and the role of media in public perception of innocence and guilt.

[Northwestern University School of Law](#), which played a critical role in the abolishment of the death penalty in Illinois, is a primary partner. A 1998 conference sponsored by the Bluhm Legal Clinic's [Center on Wrongful Convictions](#) featured 29 exonerated death row inmates giving voice to errors of the system. This event piqued the interest of then-Gov. George Ryan, who later declared a moratorium on the death penalty.

"At the [Bluhm Legal Clinic](#), we encounter every day the reflexive, routinized dehumanization of people accused and convicted of crimes," said [Robert C. Owen](#), Northwestern clinical professor of law, in reference to themes in Green's work. "'The Last Supper' powerfully challenges the notion that we share no connection with those caught in the system. Julie Green's depictions of the last meals of the condemned movingly demonstrate the profound connections among all human beings that arise from our common memories and experiences of food."

"The Last Supper" opening and spring programming

The following events are free and open to the public. They will take place at the Block Museum, unless otherwise noted.

- **Northwestern Law Professor Robert C. Owen will join artist Julie Green and Block Special Projects Curator Elliot Reichert for the Block's Opening Day Celebration from 2 to 5 p.m. Saturday, May 9.** Green will give an artist talk, after which Owen and Reichert will join her for a conversation about issues of representation, the legal system and social justice. **The Evanston campus program will begin at 2 p.m. at Fisk Hall, Room 217, 1845 Sheridan Road, followed by a reception at the Block Museum, 40 Arts Circle Drive.**

- **"Seen from Inside: Perspectives on Capital Punishment" at 6 p.m. Tuesday, May 19 at the Block Museum** will invite various perspectives on capital punishment, including those from an attorney, a death row exoneree and a death row inmate's family member. This program is being presented in partnership with the Northwestern University School of Law's Center on Wrongful Convictions.

- **Will Schmenner, Block Cinema interim curator, and the School of Communication's [Harvey Young](#), associate professor of theatre, will present "When You CAN'T Shake It Off: Social Media, Race and Police Power" at 6 p.m. Wednesday, May 27, at the Block**

Museum. This conversation will explore the role of social media in creating a national conversation about race, law and the limits of police power.

The Block also is collaborating with the [Medill Justice Project](#), [Y.O.U. \(Youth Organizations Umbrella, Inc.\) Evanston](#), the [James B. Moran Center for Youth Advocacy](#), which provides legal and social work support in Evanston, and [Evanston Township High School](#) District 202 on programming and tours. In addition, [Block Cinema](#) has scheduled five films during May and June 2015 that complement themes in “The Last Supper” exhibition. More information on these upcoming events will follow at a later date.

Creating “The Last Supper” -- The Process

Julie Green begins in her study, researching the final meal requests of death row inmates online. She also sometimes uses historical instances of last meal requests to create her annual 50 plates. After learning about the meal request, she selects a white ceramic plate and moves into her studio to paint. The images she creates can come from memory, for a familiar image such as a cheeseburger, from a recipe book that she has filled with food advertisements, or from more online research.

Green’s process is consistent -- a ceramic plate, an execution report and blue cobalt glaze fired by technical advisor Antoni Acock -- but the ingredients change every time. An order of prime rib and lobster might speak to a last grasp at luxury, while ravioli and dumplings prepared by the mother of the condemned shows desires for comfort and family.

“The Last Supper” underscores the peculiar, socially complex tradition of offering a last meal before execution, while exposing the uneven practices and policies of the state-administered capital punishment system. For instance, while cigarettes are not allowed in prisons these days, a New York inmate received a pack of Pall Malls for a last meal in 1963; while in 2011, after a Texas inmate failed to eat a particularly lavish meal, the state ended the policy of honoring last meal requests.

The state of capital punishment in the United States

Green’s exhibition comes at a time when capital punishment is making headlines for waning popular support, failed executions and controversial drug combinations. As of 2013, 35 states and the federal government allow the death penalty.

Public support for capital punishment fell from 78 percent in 1996 to 55 percent in 2013, according to the [Pew Research Center](#). The number of executions has also fallen in recent years, to 39 in 2013, according to the U.S. Department of Justice’s [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#).

About the Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art at Northwestern University

The Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art is the fine art museum of Northwestern University. It serves the academic and cultural needs of the University and the Chicago-area community with thought-provoking exhibitions, a rich and diverse permanent collection, dynamic programs, and classic and contemporary film screenings at Block Cinema.

Celebrating its 35th anniversary in 2015, the Block is a dynamic, imaginative resource that uses art as a springboard to explore issues and ideas that matter to our lives today. It is free and open to all, and visitors are invited to participate in experiential learning opportunities that bridge the classroom and the world beyond the campus.

Admission to the museum is always free. Parking in the garage and lot directly south of the museum is free all day on weekends and after 4 p.m. on weekdays. For more information, visit www.blockmuseum.northwestern.edu.

NORTHWESTERN NEWS: www.northwestern.edu/newscenter/

FOR EDITORS/WRITERS

EDITING PROCEDURE:

1. Give Pat first draft for big-picture editing.
2. Incorporate Pat's edits and carefully proof the edited story.
3. Send story to professor/source and be sure to BCC Bob on this correspondence.
4. When you get edits back, incorporate them; proof the story and then give it to an editor for a final proofread.
5. After the story has been approved by the source and copyedited, email the release to both Bob and Pat to indicate the final story is in "draft" and ready to get one last read from Bob or Pat (whoever is available); then Bob or Pat will proof the story, move it to "publish" and let the writer know. (If Caitlin or Emily are processing the release, the writer needs to let them know it is ready to be processed and whether they need to both publish the story and send it to media through VOCUS).
6. Only one version of the story should be on the Media Server — whether in "draft" or "publish" — at all times. When Pat (or Bob) adds EDIT to a story slug to indicate that the story has been edited, the writer's original story will be thrown in "trash." And in general, writers must make sure that only one copy of the story is on the Media Server — whether in "draft" or "publish" — at all times.
7. Whoever publishes a story in the CMS system needs to also mark the Microsoft Word story in the "publish" folder on the Media Server in red; if the story (such as a media advisory) has been sent to media through VOCUS but not published in the CMS system, the Microsoft Word story in the "publish" folder needs to be marked in blue.
8. When the story is published, the writer should email Steve and let him know.

Proofread by: Hilary Hurd Anyaso and Pat Tremmel

INSTRUCTIONS TO NEWSROOM

FOR POSTING:

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS: (enter details)

Keywords: ("The Last Supper," Julie Green, Block Museum, death row, last meals, Robert C. Owen, Harvey Young, Will Schmenner, Block Cinema, Northwestern Law School, Elliot Reichert, capital punishment, Antoni Acock, School of Law, School of Communication)

Photos/images: (A selection of images that relate to the Block Museum's Spring 2015 Main Gallery exhibition are available at the following NBox URL link:

<https://northwestern.app.box.com/s/l65khmwmfec671o98racdr7ovvtk3ag1>)

Caption/credit: (enter details)

Related links: (enter short description and URL)

FOR DISTRIBUTION TO MEDIA:

Subject line for release sent through Vocus:

 X Use headline from release

 Use subhead from release

Other (enter text here)

Vocus:

Evanston

Metro

B'CAST (Breaking, Fine Arts and Local Bureaus)

Other (Chicago Bureau Chiefs; Chicago Bureau, Reporters; Chicago Blogs, Editors; FA-One Month Leads; FA-Two Month Leads; FA-Visual Arts/Local; Features Editors, Local; Features, Local; Legal, Local: Legal, National: Legal, National Editors; Pioneer Press Editors; FA-Black Fine Arts, Local; FA-Movie/Film Media; FA-Visual Arts/National)

ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS: (enter details)

TribLocal Evanston

My4.org

EurekAlert (enter blurb below)

BigScience (enter blurb below)

Futurity.org

EurekAlert/BigScience blurb:

(Source contact: Joanna Gueller, communications manager, Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, at 847-467-4602 or joanna.gueller@northwestern.edu)

(Editors/writers: Joanna Gueller, communications manager, at 847-467-4602 or joanna.gueller@northwestern.edu; Susy Bielak, associate director of engagement/ curator of public practice, at 847-467-5034 or susy.bielak@northwestern.edu; Lisa Corrin, The Ellen Philips Katz Director, at 847-491-2562 or lisa.corrin@northwestern.edu)