

# Northwestern | NEWS

MEDIA CONTACT: Stephanie Kulke at 847-491-4819 or [stephanie.kulke@northwestern.edu](mailto:stephanie.kulke@northwestern.edu)

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## **Block Museum of Art receives \$350,000 National Endowment for the Humanities Grant in support of touring exhibition ‘Caravans of Gold’**

EVANSTON, Ill. --- 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 the Humanities (NEH). The grant supports the exhibition “Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time: Art, Culture and Exchange across Medieval Saharan Africa,” which will open 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, D.C. (Spring 2020).



The Block Museum grant is one of only 10 museum implementation grants offered by the NEH during this funding round, and one of 11 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” is the first major art exhibition to address the global reach of West Africa in the medieval period. The exhibition opens at the Block on Jan. 26, 2019.

The exhibition highlights a time when West African gold fueled a far-reaching economy and Saharan trade routes served as a crossroads for art, people and ideas, linking West Africa to North Africa, Europe, the Middle East and beyond. The exhibition presents more than 250 artworks and fragments spanning 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 the 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 art history, archaeology, history and comparative literature specialists 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,” said Lisa Graziose Corrin, Block Museum of Art Ellen Philips Katz Director. “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 presence in world history. This grant underscores the importance of this story to audiences on a national level.”

The Block Museum grant is one of \$43.1 million in awards for [218 humanities projects](#) across the country, announced by the NEH on Aug. 8. 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.

“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 NEH awarded the Block Museum a \$60,000 planning grant for “Caravans of Gold.” Additional generous exhibition support has been provided by the Buffett Institute for Global Studies at Northwestern, 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 the Office for Research at Northwestern, Furthermore: a program of the J.M. Kaplan Fund, the Sandra L. Riggs Publications Fund at the Block Museum and a gift from Liz Warnock to the department of art history at Northwestern. Special thanks to the Art Institute of Chicago for curatorial research support.

### **About 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](http://www.neh.gov).

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