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NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY NEWS

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HOW CAN ART BE USED AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CHANGE?
Block Museum to host free Artists' Congress on Evanston campus May 17

EVANSTON, Ill. --- Socially and politically-engaged Chicago area artists, scholars from across disciplines, students and activists will convene on Northwestern University's Evanston campus in mid-May to address contemporary issues of art and social change and to ponder historical questions that still resonate today.

Organized in conjunction with the University's [Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art's](#) exhibition "[The Left Front: Radical Art in the 'Red Decade,' 1929-1940,](#)" this groundbreaking public forum re-imagines meetings of the 1930s American Artists Congress, and takes Left Front member Louis Lozowick's question "What Should Revolutionary Artists Do Today?" as its inspiration.

Free and open to the public, the Artists' Congress will take place from 1 to 5 p.m. Saturday, May 17, at the Ethel M. Barber Theater, 30 Arts Circle Drive, on Northwestern's Evanston campus. A reception will follow next door at the Block Museum, 40 Arts Circle Drive.

Chicago's history runs deep with artists invested in questions of social change, and artists who were on the front lines for civil liberties and workers rights, noted [Susy Bielak](#), the Block's associate director of engagement and curator of public practice.

"Chicago is a center today for artists addressing social issues ranging from looming global climate change and wealth inequity, to gun violence and injustices in the prison industry," Bielak said. "As part of the Block's mission, we're interested in projects that connect the past and present. While the Artists' Congress of the 1930s addressed the singular issues of class struggle and fascism, we are exploring what matters to artists and society today."

To produce the Artists' Congress, the Block Museum has partnered with two local leaders in the field: [Daniel Tucker](#), an artist, writer and organizer of Never the Same, an oral history and archive project on Chicago's socially-engaged art practices and [Michael Rakowitz](#), professor in the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences department of art theory and practice.

The afternoon program features presentations and performances by artists and educators from across disciplines. It also includes an open forum to share tools, tactics and calls to action. For details, visit www.artistscongressopencall.com.

Program presenters and performers include:

- John Murphy, a Northwestern doctoral candidate and co-curator of the Block Museum's "The Left Front" exhibition, who will discuss the political context and aesthetic controversies that gave rise to the first American Artists' Congress.
- Northwestern department of art history faculty member [Christina Kiaer](#) will talk about the historic Artists' Union in Russia.
- Artist and writer [Paul Durica](#), founder of Pocket Guide to Hell, a series of Chicago-based crime, social justice and labor history tours and reenactments, will present a case study related to Chicago's Haymarket Riot.
- Artist and critic [Eric Triantafillou](#) will share his experience as the art director for the Service Employees International Union's (SEIU) "Take Back Chicago" campaign during the "Occupy" protests in Fall 2012.
- Community and political organizer [Don Washington](#) will present his Mayoral Tutorial, "What Do You Know About the Mayor's Agenda?"
- Curator and scholar [Romi Crawford](#), will talk about London's famous Speakers' Corner -- a symbol of free speech and the right of assembly -- as well as Chicago artists and the spaces and outlets for their expression.
- Performance artist [Baraka de Soleil](#) will present a culminating performance on resistance as physical force.
- [Michael J. Kramer](#), a Northwestern visiting assistant professor focused on 20th-century U.S. cultural and intellectual history, American studies, digital humanities and civic engagement, will present the day's soundtrack spanning folk music to punk.

In addition, a number of grassroots artist/activists who were nominated by key Chicago social justice organizations will be recognized in the afternoon program.

The Congress will feature a public forum facilitated by artists/educators [Anthony Romero](#) and [Nicole Garneau](#) that is focused on responses to an ongoing Open Call to Artists, inviting additions and interventions from the broad public. For more information, visit www.artistscongressopencall.com/call.

For more information on a related participatory blog platform, inviting the public to answer the question "What is revolutionary art today?" visit <http://theleftfront-blockmuseum.tumblr.com>.

The event has been made possible by the Terra Foundation for the Arts and Northwestern's [Alice Kaplan Institute for the Humanities](#). For more event information, visit http://www.blockmuseum.northwestern.edu/view/exhibitions/current-exhibits/an_artists_congress.html.

For directions to the Block Museum and parking information, visit www.blockmuseum.northwestern.edu/visit.

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