

MEDIA ALERT

Weinberg/Newton Gallery

EXHIBITION

Block Building

EXHIBITION DATES

October 12 – December 8

OPENING RECEPTION

Friday, October 12
5–8 PM

LOCATION

Weinberg/Newton Gallery
300 W Superior Street, Suite 203
Chicago, IL 60654

HOURS

Mon – Sat 10 AM – 5 PM

VISIT US ONLINE

weinbergnewtongallery.com

ALL MEDIA REQUESTS

Please contact
Claire Arctander
312 529 5090
claire@d-weinberg.com

High-resolution images of artwork are available upon request.

OVERVIEW

Block Building juxtaposes the past and present while tracing both a rich history and vibrant future for Chicago's block clubs – ultralocal civic organizations that have deep roots throughout the city. The exhibition is organized in partnership with My Block, My Hood, My City and features block club signs that have been designed and fabricated by youth in Arts + Public Life's Design Apprenticeship Program, alongside the old signs they've replaced. Additional components of the exhibition include process sketches for the new signs and home movie footage of 1960s block parties in Chicago.

CONTRIBUTORS

The Design Apprenticeship Program of the University of Chicago's Arts + Public Life and the South Side Home Movie Project

PARTNER

My Block, My Hood, My City provides youth with an awareness of the world and opportunities beyond their neighborhood. They work to help teenagers overcome poverty and isolation by supporting educational attainment. Reflecting core values of interconnectivity, empathy, hope, and civic responsibility, My Block, My Hood, My City offers hands-on experiences in the contexts of the arts, STEM, citizenry and volunteerism, health, community development, culinary arts, and entrepreneurship.

ABOUT WEINBERG/NEWTON GALLERY

Weinberg/Newton Gallery aims to create space for dialogue about the many social justice issues that concern our local Chicago community and beyond. In collaboration with artists and non-profit organizations, we work together to cultivate a culture of consciousness and inspire change by way of exhibitions, panel discussions, film screenings, artist talks, and more.

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Signs pervade the city. Directing us, notifying us, selling to us, and often, telling us what *not* to do. Whose voices speak these countless messages? And if we disagree with what they demand, how can we respond? *Block Building* demonstrates the visionary potential of signs to point to a neighborhood, a city, and a world characterized by connections rather than divisions, by aspirations rather than prohibitions.

The very medium of signage embodies an air of authority. The members of Chicago's block clubs, ultralocal civic organizations that have deep roots throughout the city, have long harnessed this power by erecting their own often hand-painted signs that spell out the expectations of conduct in their communities. These signs have historically featured the word *NO* followed by a list of undesired activities, from car repair to drug use, detailed in bold block letters.

Recently, block club members and community activists have pushed to redirect the energies of block club signs. Elder block club members, many of whom have been active in their communities for decades, exchanged ideas with teen artists to imagine how new signs could most fully convey their neighborhoods' goals, with a focus on colorful, exuberant imagery evoking environmentalism, heritage, and pride. The signs still appeal for order with words too, but the language often invites introspection on the values and efforts of neighboring, as demonstrated in the text of an updated sign for the club located on the 7700 block of South Hermitage Avenue: *Refrain / Reflect / Respect*. Such respect for place cultivates a ground from which neighborliness can grow and thrive.

Block Building presents twelve block club signs that have been newly-made by youth of the Design Apprenticeship Program of the University of Chicago's Arts + Public Life to replace existing signs. These signs are presented alongside a selection of their predecessors as well as process sketches, ephemera from block club members' personal archives, and home movie footage of 1960s block parties from the South Side Home Movie Project. Altogether, *Block Building* juxtaposes the past and present while tracing both a rich history and vibrant future for Chicago's block clubs.

The history of block clubs is deep and varied. Since the early twentieth century, block clubs have proliferated across Chicago, as well as many other American cities. These self-directed groups have thrived in neighborhoods on the south and west sides, with strong (but

by no means exclusive) membership amongst black Chicagoans. After the Great Migration, one function of block clubs was to help people who had never lived in big cities before adjust to urban mores. Over time, the clubs have served the greater purpose of fostering a sense of responsibility for community amongst neighbors. The leadership structure of block clubs is as varied as the clubs themselves. Some clubs are fully autonomous, while some are sponsored by organizations like the Chicago Urban League. In fact, the Chicago Police Department is the biggest current organizer of block clubs in the city. Yet, the spirit of each block club resides in the commitment of its members – a commitment to beautify space, to resolve disputes, to put in the work of active community-building.

Weinberg/Newton Gallery is proud to present *Block Building* in partnership with My Block, My Hood, My City (M3), an advocacy organization that provides youth with an awareness of opportunities beyond their neighborhood. M3 leads youth on exploratory programs that allow them to delve into the arts, STEM, citizenry and volunteerism, health, community development, culinary arts, and entrepreneurship. My Block, My Hood, My City partnered with Arts + Public Life's Design Apprenticeship Program – a young adult skill building and mentorship program – to facilitate the production of fresh signs as symbols of self-directed reinvigoration for several of the city's many block clubs. The signs will stand in the gallery for the duration of the exhibition before they move on to occupy their intended roles in situ as heralds of collectivity.

Block clubs demonstrate the potential of the intimate collective. Even for those of us living in the close quarters of cities, it is all too easy to focus our attentions within the walls of our own homes and through the windows of our digital screens. In exerting the efforts to strive with those that live next door for the common goal of safe,

beautiful environs, block club members enact true neighborliness. To neighbor is not just to pass by in the stairwell or on the corner, to share a mutual dumpster, or to vote in the same school's gymnasium. To neighbor is to come together in conflict and difference as well as in celebration and similarity, to negotiate, to set an auspicious stage.

Won't you be a neighbor?

LOCATION

Unless noted, all events are free and open to the public, and will take place at Weinberg/Newton Gallery.

300 W Superior Street, Suite 203
Chicago, IL 60654

Handicap accessible entrance is located at 730 N Franklin Street, call the gallery upon arrival.

The gallery may be reached at 312 529 5090 or info@weinbergnewtongallery.com

Block Building

OPENING RECEPTION

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 12, 5–8 PM

FAMILY DAY: WON'T YOU BE A NEIGHBOR?

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 20, 1-4 PM

REIMAGINE WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A NEIGHBOR! COMMUNITY MEMBERS OF ALL AGES ARE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN AN INTERACTIVE SIGN-MAKING WORKSHOP

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

SIGNS FOR COMMUNITY

PART OF THE CHICAGO HUMANITIES FESTIVAL'S 2018 FALL FESTIVAL, GRAPHIC!

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 7:30-8:30 PM

LOCATION:

PAUL ROBESON THEATRE
SOUTH SHORE CULTURAL CENTER
7059 S SOUTH SHORE DRIVE

JAHMAL COLE AND AMANDA SELIGMAN
DISCUSS THE HISTORY AND CURRENT REVITALIZATION OF CHICAGO'S BLOCK CLUBS

TICKETS AVAILABLE AT CHICAGOHUMANITIES.ORG

SCREENING: THE AREA

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 6, 6-8PM

THE AREA IS A FEATURE-LENGTH, LOCALLY-PRODUCED DOCUMENTARY ABOUT THE RESILIENCE OF ENGLEWOOD RESIDENTS WHEN A RAILROAD COMPANY SEEKS TO EXPAND THROUGH THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD. THE SCREENING WILL BE FOLLOWED BY A DISCUSSION WITH FILMMAKERS BRIAN ASHBY AND DEBORAH PAYNE.

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC



Arts + Public Life's **DESIGN APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM** at the University of Chicago is a design-based mentorship and skills building initiative that encourages teens and young adults to invest in the improvement of the physical and social conditions of their community. By developing skills in carpentry, landscaping, and design, DAP leaders aid in the positive transformation of Washington Park and the Garfield Boulevard corridor. Participants become true stewards of their neighborhoods, learning to build not only infrastructure but also relationships. DAP encourages the development of design mentors within the Chicago and national design community by creating platforms for designers to talk to young people about their work.

Guided by Gabe Moreno, Design Apprenticeship Program and Project Manager, the following youth made the new block club signs on display in the gallery and on the streets: Jamaira Banks, Mikila Bloodson, Davion Brown, Denise Brown, Milik Clay, Darkenya Donner, Destiny Hart, Antaja Johnson, Makayla Keys, Alisia Knox, Angelica Kula, Arniyah Israel, Zahria Jackson, Jamaia Johnson, Jahari Judkins, Jasmine Mack, Adonis Malone, Laila May, Detrina Mccoy, Martha Morales, Tyla Moore, Anthony Ramos, Destiny Richardson, and Aisha Romer

IMAGE: DESIGN APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM
PARTICIPANTS AND BLOCK CLUB MEMBERS





THE SOUTH SIDE HOME MOVIE PROJECT is a five-part initiative to collect, preserve, digitize, exhibit, and research home movies made by residents of Chicago's South Side neighborhoods.

The SSHMP aims to build an alternative, accessible visual record, filling gaps in existing written and visual histories, and ensuring that the diverse experiences and perspectives of South Siders will be available to larger audiences and to future generations. Supported by the University of Chicago's Division of Humanities, Center for the Study of Race, Politics, & Culture, Film Studies Center, Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts, Women's Board, and the Office of Civic Engagement's Community Program Accelerator and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture.

IMAGE: STILL FROM BLOCK PARTY CA. 1960. LYNETTE FRAZIER COLLECTION
COURTESY OF THE SOUTH SIDE HOME MOVIE PROJECT

south side home movie project

What are block clubs?

BLOCK CLUBS ARE VARIED

They are groups of people who have homes on the same block who organize to improve the quality of life in their neighborhood

Each block club – its members, its goals – is unique

Block clubs can maintain collective green spaces, address local infrastructure issues, assist neighbors in need, and much more

Block clubs address local symptoms of violence and dissonance, both directly and indirectly

BLOCK CLUBS ARE HISTORIC

They started in Chicago in the 1910s to help new black residents acclimate to city life during the Great Migration

The Chicago Urban League founded many block clubs, while others were entirely autonomous

Block clubs proliferated during World War II

While many block clubs have shorter life spans, the Winona Foster Carmen Winnemac Block Club in Uptown has operated since 1962

BLOCK CLUBS ARE ACTIVE

The efforts of block clubs are fueled by resident volunteers

Block clubs currently exist all over the city, but flourish on the west and south sides in particular

The Chicago Police Department is the largest local sponsor of block clubs today

My Block, My Hood, My City (M3) is a vessel to introduce Chicagoans to places in their city they've never seen or experienced and to people they would have never met. Through this exchange, the city as a whole develops more empathy, understanding, and unity. We work with underprivileged youth through our Explorer's Program which provides an awareness of the world and opportunities beyond their neighborhoods.

At M3 we believe in providing opportunities for others to step outside their comfort zones and explore new communities, cultures, and cuisines in an effort to gain a greater understanding of the world. Each and every one of us needs to take responsibility for our communities. It is only through our efforts of service, empathy, and collaboration that will we see our communities truly evolve.

Our collaboration with Weinberg/Newton Gallery is a bright light towards the future. Through this exhibit we hope to further connect communities and promote the value of Block Clubs and the development of citizenry and volunteerism. We hope we each can leave with a new sense of duty to our neighbors near and far, and with new optimism for the future we will create.

Jahmal Cole
Founder and Executive Director
My Block, My Hood, My City

MY BLOCK
MY HOOD
MY CITY™
★ ★ ★ ★

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