



**SMART MUSEUM OF ART**  
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

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**WELCOME BLANKET**  
*July 18–December 17, 2017*

**The Smart Museum of Art presents *Welcome Blanket*, a new participatory, durational, activist artwork anchoring the museum as a platform for exploring the critical political issues of our contemporary moment through the lens of artistic practice**

Created by LA-based designer and artist Jayna Zweiman—co-founder of the 2016 *Pussyhat Project*—*Welcome Blanket* confronts the issue of immigration and President Donald Trump’s border wall proposal by recasting the roughly 2000-mile distance of the proposed barrier between Mexico and the United States into handmade blankets. Representing the distance of the wall in lengths of yarn, participants across the United States and around the world will create lap blankets and accompanying notes of welcome for new immigrants as well as for refugees seeking resettlement, a craft based response to the current administration’s policies.

At the Smart, *Welcome Blanket* will exist as a participatory project that marries artistic practice, freedom of expression, and community engagement. The Museum’s contemporary galleries will open on July 18th as an empty site which will be quickly activated as a receiving station to sort and store the blankets. Blankets will accumulate in the space over the run of the project, transforming it from a visually sparse site of potential action into a vibrant installation of crowd-sourced blankets. Throughout *Welcome Blanket*, visitors will be invited to spend time knitting in the gallery or joining a series of public programs that will take place over the fall, creating spaces for conversations around issues of human rights, immigration, and the legacy of artistic activism.

As the installation itself is created through a crowd-sourced production of blankets, so too will the Museum-hosted dialogues and public programs be “crowd-sourced.” As the project launches, the Smart Museum will be reaching out to a diverse audience of community members to invite suggestions about what kinds of programming and conversations might offer the most meaningful and productive forums for addressing these topics. “Through *Welcome Blanket*, the Smart is committed to offering the Museum as a space where artistic practice prompts examination and discussion of the most significant issues of today from every angle,” says Alison Gass, Dana Feitler Director of the Smart Museum. “We are proud to be a platform where Jayna Zweiman’s ‘craftivist’ vision can be explored together in an open environment like the University of Chicago, where reflecting, questioning, and debating difficult issues is integral to the intellectual culture. We look forward to partnering with many great thinkers, artists, activists, and community members to facilitate conversations around the issues of immigration to the United States.”

Michael Christiano, Interim Senior Director of Museum Programs adds, “We’re excited to think about how *Welcome Blanket* can connect with and respond to the landscape of socially engaged projects and grassroots activism already happening in Chicago. Our cultural, civic, and University partners will help generate a discourse around these issues that is international in scope but grounded in the sensibilities of this city. *Welcome Blanket* creates additional space for collective effort through which we hope to amplify all of the great work happening in and around Chicago.”

According to Zweiman, “*Pussyhat Project* proved that political activism can take many forms. *Welcome*

*Blanket* takes the notion one step further: individuals and organizations can express political beliefs powerfully through crafting and visual statement all the while creating a useful object to give to someone, that is ceremoniously kind, engaging, and politically powerful.” The designer of the original pattern for the Pussyhat, Kat Coyle, will lend her design skills and contribute a pattern for knitters to follow to create blankets.

Individuals looking to get involved should visit [smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/exhibitions/welcome-blanket](http://smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/exhibitions/welcome-blanket) or [welcomeblanket.org](http://welcomeblanket.org) for more information on design specifications, where to send their completed projects, and discussion guides on the topic of immigration and refugee resettlement.

*Welcome Blanket* is organized at the Smart Museum by Alison Gass, Dana Feitler Director, and Michael Christiano, Interim Senior Director of Museum Programs.

### **About Jayna Zweiman**

Jayna Zweiman is a multidisciplinary artist and designer. Zweiman’s independent practice combines architecture, art and new media to focus on experiences that overlap physical, virtual and conceptual spaces. She is a co-founder of Pussyhat Project, an international network and movement of women’s rights supporters. The project was highly visible at the 2017 Women’s Marches with one of the largest crowd-sourced art advocacy projects ever. She received her AB from Brown University in visual arts and economics and her Masters in Architecture from Harvard University Graduate School of Design. She lives and works in Los Angeles.

### **About the Smart Museum of Art**

As the fine arts museum of the University of Chicago, the Smart Museum of Art is home to thought-provoking exhibitions and an exquisite collection of more than 15,000 objects, including modern masterpieces, millennia-old Chinese artworks, rich examples of Renaissance painting, and provocative works of contemporary art. Through collaborations with scholars, the Smart has established itself as a driving force for creative thinking through the arts at the University and a pioneering model of what a 21st century academic art museum can be. The Museum also offers distinctive programs that inspire visitors of all ages to experience the dynamic role of the visual arts in our world. The Smart first opened in 1974.

### **Mission**

The Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago opens the world through art and ideas.

### **Smart Museum of Art**

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### **Hours**

Tuesday–Sunday, 10 am–5 pm

Thursday evenings until 8 pm

Galleries are closed Mondays and holidays.

Admission is always free. All are welcome.