

UMMA Creates Museum Coalition to Promote Voting and Democracy

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by Linda Bennett

"We're setting people off on their voting careers and we want that first early experience to be good." Alliance leader and UMMA Director Christina Olsen told *The New York Times* ("[10 Campus Museums Shine a Spotlight on Democracy](#)")

As a leader in an alliance of large, public museums, Olsen cites urgency to mitigate polarization and vitriol. Nine other university museums are also participating. She notes that safe places to think are needed now more than ever as campuses undergo free speech and political protests. Practical issues include students asking if they can vote via phone, or if they are eligible vote if they live out-of-state.

"Museums are vital places where that engagement can take place art has the extraordinary ability to explore differences and disagree in ways that are sustainable and civil."

The goal of UMMA's museum voting gallery, opening September 24, 2024, is a space that is both aesthetically pleasing and relaxing. Olsen commented that when people vote for the first time, they "often feel rushed or are unsure of which line to be in." UMMA's voting gallery will include clear and understandable signage and plenty of people ready to assist those who need help.

For the Michigan general election in November, UMMA will transform into a satellite location of the Ann Arbor City Clerk's office and a one-stop-shop for anyone looking to vote in Ann Arbor. Register to vote, update your registration, request an absentee ballot, vote early, and cast your ballot on election day!

GO BLUE! GO VOTE!

Additional details about each museum's plans are shared below (in alphabetical order):

Michigan State University (Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum)

The Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum will partner with The Judith Center, a new non-profit organization founded by artist Kathryn Andrews that brings together women artists, activists, and thought leaders to spur conversation. Together the MSU Broad Art Museum and the Judith Center will commission artists to create posters that deal with the issue of misogyny and sexism in the U.S. and the lack of representation and involvement of women in politics. The initial five commissioned posters will be displayed at the museum, just

steps away from the Michigan state capitol in Lansing, starting in spring 2024, leading up to and through the fall election cycle.

The Pennsylvania State University (Palmer Museum of Art)

The Palmer Museum will feature the rich diversity of art being produced by native, transplanted, and adopted Pennsylvanians in the present moment that speak to the politics of race and representation, activism and social justice, while *Politics and Daily Life*, will present a range of politically inflected imagery from the permanent collection to catalyze conversations around empowerment, injustice, propaganda, patriotism, and protest. In addition, the Palmer will host a series of student engagement programs, including a “Fight for Your Rights pARTy” and “The Art of the Vote,” where Penn State students can register to vote and reflect on the power of art to communicate, question, and inspire change.

Rutgers University (Zimmerli Art Museum)

In fall 2024, the Zimmerli Art Museum will continue its collaboration with the Eagleton Institute’s Center for Youth Political Participation, a non-partisan effort to register, mobilize, and engage Rutgers University students to participate in politics and vote in local, state and national elections. The effort, known as RU Voting, will organize volunteers to conduct voter registration campaigns at museum events, including Zimmerli’s monthly art party, SparkNight. RU Voting Interns are leading the ongoing efforts that began in January 2024. In addition, the Zimmerli will open *Smoke and Mirrors*, an exhibition that disrupts normative ideas about accessibility in public spaces by showcasing fifteen artists with disabilities, organized by guest curator Dr. Amanda Cachia (University of Houston), a leading scholar in disability studies and activism.

UCLA (Hammer Museum)

The Hammer Museum has been a voting center and polling location for several election cycles; that will continue during the 2024 presidential election. The museum will host a variety of democracy and civic engagement-related programming this year, including a Super Tuesday Viewing Party, a documentary film series about elections, and an event related to the U.S. Constitution.

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (Krannert Art Museum)

The Krannert Art Museum will open a collaborative installation interrogating ideas of democracy, social justice, and social movements. The installation will feature works selected by the Krannert community, including local high school students. It will be installed on the Museum’s entrance wall during the fall 2024 semester. In addition, the museum will host an arts advocacy event – in tandem with a state organization – to provide training for advocacy for the regional arts communities of Champaign-Urbana.

University of Iowa (Stanley Museum of Art)

The Stanley Museum of Art will open *To My Friends at Horn: Keith Haring and Iowa City* on May 4, 2024. Keith Haring envisioned a world where art functioned as a pillar of education and civic life, and this was particularly evident in his dedication to working with children. By revisiting the artist’s two trips to Iowa City, where he painted a mural at an elementary school in 1989, this exhibition considers the artist’s commitment to freedom of expression as foundational for a democracy to flourish. Also on view is *Generations*, an installation of the permanent collection that focuses on displacement, immigration, and transnational circulation, questions of equity and sovereignty, and ecological crisis.

University of Michigan (UMMA)

After hosting successful voting initiatives in 2020 and 2022, UMMA is expanding its commitment to civic responsibility and demystifying the voting process. In collaboration with the Creative Campus Voting Project (CCVP) led by Stephanie Rowden and Hannah Smotrich, UMMA will transform one of its galleries into a fully functional City Clerk’s office to allow registration, absentee ballot requests, and early voting for Ann Arbor

voters. CCVP will design the space with artful elements to make voting accessible and anxiety-free. In addition, artist Philippa Pham Hughes will curate an exhibition involving works from the Museum's collection arranged on a commissioned mural installed directly on the gallery wall. Hughes' installation will be an interactive experience and include relational events, discussions, and lectures aimed at engaging the "exhausted majority" to counter political polarization.

University of Nebraska (Sheldon Museum of Art)

The Sheldon Museum of Art exhibition (In)credible: Exploring Trust and Misperceptions encourages visitors to consider how we sort through the vast amount of available information to determine what is, or is not, trustworthy. During the fall 2024 semester, a second iteration of the installation will build upon the first, directly tying media literacy to voter rights and election fairness. Sheldon is also working with Husker Vote Coalition, a nonpartisan University of Nebraska-Lincoln committee run out of UNL's Student Leadership, Involvement, and Community Engagement Office, to host voter registration tables where people can register to vote, check their voter registration status, sign up to vote by mail for elections in Nebraska or out of state, and learn more about voting.

University of Oregon (Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art)

The museum's major fall exhibition, Necroarchivos de las Americas – An Unrelenting Search for Justice, explores art from across Latin America that confronts political violence, whether created by the state or by political and private actors operating outside the bounds of the established order. In works that range widely in artistic method and aesthetic strategy.

University of Wisconsin-Madison (Chazen Museum of Art)

The Chazen Museum of Art has served as a polling place for the City of Madison since 2020, which will continue with the 2024 election cycle. The museum opens early on election day and turns over its spacious lobby to poll workers and citizens of the precinct.

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