

## Audio Transcript, Stop 11: 2021-Present

Welcome. My name is George Langford and I'm the associate dean for infrastructure planning and design. I've worked at Pritzker School of Law for 25 years, and to me, Northwestern School of Law means legacy.

We're in a process of shaping histories now, and we have the opportunity to look critically at that which has come before.

The law school collection, as you've learned, has a long history. Dean Wigmore's passion for art and artifacts really stand out among our oldest building. There have been traditions of painting portraits for the people that we want to elevate and we want to remember. And a lot of this has been done through singular perspectives.

Our efforts have been to work, to elevate underrepresented stories, to do more justice, to the variety of perspectives in our community, to make sure that people can see themselves as students, as professionals, as human beings in the works that we have on display.

I think the goal is inclusion, and I think that we work to ground ourselves, to remember that we're in one of the best cities in the world, that we are among the community of exceptional people, and that this moment is an opportunity for us to excel.

So we focus on underrepresented voices. We focus on connection to Chicago, on contemporary art practice and mission. If there are opportunities for our investments to connect with the people that are making art and support them through their efforts, we look toward early and early mid-career artists frequently, and the ones with a strong connection to Chicago more often than not, as a way to stay engaged with our city and speak to our values.

The Alicia Womsley piece, "So Says the Beautiful Spirit: Circle." It's a fiber arts piece, is a stick at the top of this, which functions as the top of the loom. And it's a black rectangular field with an off white circle in it. Sort of looks like the moon at the bottom of the piece. There are several strings that hold additional small sticks.

In the center of the piece, there's a microchip and a small screen, and it has text on it. "It is right that a black woman should lead a womb was what God made in the beginning, and out of that one was born time and all that fills up space. So says the beautiful spirit."

But we think of space in terms of its ability to allow people to be productive, to be inspired, to be their best. The impact of space. If you think of the way you might feel in a cafe, or you could feel in a church, or you might feel in a Capitol building. You know, each of these spaces inspired different attitudes and different approaches.

And I think we are we're trying to find ways to help people to be successful, to find moments of peace, or to find opportunities to gather and to do all of this for a community that has got to spend three years with us here. So we want to be a lot of things to a lot of people.

As you walk toward the Combe Arcade, you pass the Parillo courtroom. The monitor outside will be red if the room is in use. You'll also pass the sponsored stops with the South Asian Law Students Association on your way. Please feel free to visit both before resuming the core tour.

The Combe Arcade is just off of the law school atrium. The atrium is a fascinating space in that it is bordered on one side, on the west, by the exterior wall of the Gary and Coon library, and then on the east by the Rudolf Building, which is built in 1984. It was a space that in the 80s was built without a defined purpose. It was really a pass through. And over time we've modified it as a gathering space, a student study space.

And at some point it became so popular for events, dining and study that we realized we had to build a separate eating area to try to reduce the amount of stress on that space.

It functions really as the heart of the law school. And so it's very important for us. And when we put things near there, it says a lot about their importance to us.

The instruction corridor, the Combe Arcade, has two of the most heavily used classrooms that we have at the law school, Rubloff 140 and 150, Aspen Hall. This corridor is a space that many, many of our students will have to traverse every day, particularly at first year students.

And so, you know, this is a space where we have an opportunity to share work and share ideas and create conversations. I think we want a variety of experiences here. Color is important.

Often we want a multi-modal experience. So, you know you can see this from a distance. You can see it. There's a series of works. You can see it close up. You can say, "I enjoyed that piece, but I'm not going to spend a lot of time with it." Or you can spend time and you can really engage with each piece.

And particularly the Williams one. It's a large abstract piece which is largely red. And then there are marks that could be read as waves or timelines, and there's a sculptural quality to the surface of this piece where you can really see that something was used to scrape at the paint, and there's layers, heavy layers. And so I think that's the key to this one is I think that it it's open to interpretation.

The mark making I think is the most important thing. You can see the layers and the places where the tool that was used to mold the paint has almost removed all of it, and the canvas

below is visible. In this case, the mark making was done with a piece from one of the houses from the color theory. [Colored Theory] was a piece where she and a large group of volunteers painted houses that were slated for demolition in the Inglewood neighborhood. Amanda Williams is a resident of Inglewood. They would paint these houses a monochromatic color, so that they would stand out away from the other pieces from the land, and the colors that she used were coded out of a black experience. So there was a purple that was from a Crown Royal bag, or there was a orangey red that was flaming Hot Cheetos. And so there was a number of layers of coating within these pieces.

She was commenting on a number of things. One of the things that stood out was the fact that these properties would have a significant value and would not be demolished if they were in other areas of the city.

It was the Amanda Williams piece that we have. It was not as figurative as the other work that she had done in a color theory, obviously, because it was a photograph. And so what you see is abstraction. But the through line that she has been working with, place, space, Displacement, that finds its way into the abstract piece that we have at the law school.

The name is a number, a series of numbers. It's 2015-410-0000. It is a lot number.

Now, to tell you the truth, I don't actually know what that piece of property signifies. We've looked it up and I have to ask her, but it certainly continues to speak about place and space.

The work that we're doing is important, and it isn't our job to select things that reflect our personal preferences necessarily, although they that may overlap with what is chosen for this institution.

I think the goal is to work to understand our community and our community's priorities, our community's blindspots, our community's aspirations, and to try to find ways to purchase and install pieces that help us to have conversations to expand our perspectives, our ability to interact with one another, our ability to solve problems through new approaches.

A number of students have shared with me that the work that we've put up has made a difference in their law school experience, that they feel seen, and I think that's valuable. We're excited when we can assist in finding ways for people to feel like this is another home for them, another supportive place.

So, I mean, I think the artwork functions in some ways primarily as decoration. We are adorning the walls. They're also saying something about the people who occupy this space. We're talking about things that we aspire to. I think the architecture of our buildings, there's a lot of glass in these spaces, and I think the idea there is that you can continue to see the lake. You can see Chicago, you can see the Hancock Tower or the water tower place.

Through this artwork, you can have a different approach toward scholarship, a different connection to potential impacts. That inspiration comes in all sorts of ways. So if there's someone that's feeling down and they can look at a piece and they can be uplifted through that, or if they're working through an idea and they see a piece of artwork and it causes them to have another approach towards solving that issue, or if it's something that people can have a conversation about and learn to discuss ideas they hold in common together, or they can talk about difference civilly. I think these are all good things.

The Visibility Initiative continues to inspire this work and continue to take this work and use it in ways that promote social justice and engagement with community.

And so I think it's become an important part for many students, an important part of the law school experience.

How did placement, presentation and artist intentions impact and artwork's ability to fulfill institutional purposes both now and in the future?

Please step back into the atrium for the final stop of the tour. If you direct your gaze upwards toward the Stevens' chair and the main elevator, you will see the final work.