

February 18, 2010

Contact: Curt Guenther, 901-678-2843,
or Leslie Luebbers, 901-678-2224,
lluebbrs@memphis.edu

NOTE: Additional images and information are available at: www.paulrwilliamsproject.org

The University of Memphis Launches the Paul R. Williams Project

The Paul R. Williams Project, a collaboration that focuses on the life and work of the pioneering architect, has been launched by the University of Memphis, the Memphis chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), and the Memphis chapter of the National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA).

Paul Revere Williams (1894-1980) was one of the most admired and successful architects of the 20th century and the first documented African-American member of AIA and the first to become a Fellow (FAIA). Although his work made a significant impact on the architecture of his time, especially on the image of Los Angeles in the popular imagination, information about him is limited and scattered. Williams' office records were destroyed by fire during the 1992 Los Angeles riots. As of early 2006, the readily accessible body of knowledge about Paul R. Williams consisted of two publications by his granddaughter, Karen Hudson, an elegant 1993 photographic compendium and a children's book about Williams' life, an unpublished 1992 doctoral dissertation by Wesley Howard Henderson about Williams' career strategies, plus a short list of articles about his work and a handful of Williams' own writings.

The Art Museum at the University of Memphis (AMUM), AIA Memphis, Memphis NOMA, the University of Memphis Benjamin F. Hooks Institute for Social Change, and Departments of Art and Architecture, are collaborating on the multi-faceted Paul R. Williams Project, to bring Williams' career back into focus. The goal of the project is to help expand public knowledge about this extraordinary American architect, whose success was achieved against a background of pervasive racism in a particularly exclusionary profession.

The project is supported by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts.

About the Project

The original project, which began in early 2006 as one of several AIA 150 initiatives celebrating 150 years of excellence by the AIA, focused on an exhibition that would recognize and honor Williams'

life and work. However, it soon became apparent that a more comprehensive approach was necessary to develop basic resources. Since then the project has expanded to include a Web site designed to encourage scholarship – www.paulrwilliamsproject.org – and an educational component, intended to increase the use and knowledge of design disciplines in K-12 classrooms.

The Web site's primary resource is a growing bibliography with currently more than 1,200 citations, including specific references to Williams found in books, newspapers, scholarly, architectural, and popular publications, as well as those that relate to the architectural and social contexts of his life and career. The resources also include a steadily expanding gallery with photos and historical notes of to date more than 80 projects, as well as information about publicly accessible archives containing materials relating to Williams.

The educational component involves four parts, ranging from curriculum development through a professional learning community model to implementation of the curriculum in schools during the exhibition. In June, AIA Memphis, AMUM, and the art education program at the University of Memphis, will offer the 2010 Paul R. Williams Summer Institute geared toward K-12 teachers who want to learn about and implement design disciplines, such as architecture, into their teaching.

The exhibition, scheduled to open at AMUM in September to coincide with AIA Memphis' Seventh Annual Architecture Month, will consist of new and period photographs, new models, short film sequences, historical ephemera, and interactive stations documenting Williams' career within the contexts of American social history and changes in the built environment.

About Paul R. Williams

Born in Los Angeles to Memphians Lila Wright Williams and Chester Stanley Williams, Paul Revere Williams is considered one of the most successful African-American architects of all-time. Educated in the early 1900's at the Los Angeles atelier of the Beaux Arts Institute of New York, Williams went on to study architectural engineering at the University of Southern California.

He gained commissions for Roosevelt Naval Base (Long Beach, CA), Los Angeles County Court House, Los Angeles International Airport, the Beverly Hills Hotel, Saks Fifth Avenue (Beverly Hills), Howard University (Washington, D.C.) and St. Jude Children's Research Hospital (Memphis, TN). Williams also earned the moniker of "Architect to the Stars" as he designed homes for golden-age Hollywood stars and influential business tycoons such as Tyrone Powers, Lon Chaney, Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz, Jay Paley, Barbara Stanwyck, William Paley, and Frank Sinatra. His 60-year career in architecture included the creation of more than 3,000 residential, governmental and commercial buildings.

About the Collaborators

The Art Museum at the University of Memphis – AMUM – is an important part of the College of Communication and Fine Arts. It presents educational programs for all ages that engage University of Memphis students, the university community, residents of Memphis and the Mid-South Region. The

museum houses the Institute of Egyptian Art and Archaeology's permanent collection, AMUM's collection of Works on Paper, and the African Installation, *Africa Visual Arts of a Continent*.

AIA Memphis has served West Tennessee as the local chapter of The American Institute of Architects (AIA) for almost 55 years. Members of AIA from across the globe have worked with each other and their communities to create more valuable, healthy, secure, and sustainable buildings and cityscapes.

The Institute's local voices join more than 85,000 architects and allied professionals and it is one of more than 300 chapters across the country and around the world. AIA Memphis' mission is to promote architecture and the profession; advocate for livable and sustainable communities; and serve as a resource for its members.

Memphis NOMA is an emerging chapter of the National Organization of Minority Architects. The Memphis chapter provides local members a base to contribute knowledge and expertise, and join with other organizations to address the challenges confronting the local community. Central to the chapter's mission is the goal to strengthen ties between students, community and professionals who practice and study architecture and related fields. It works in concert with the newly formed student chapter of NOMA at the University of Memphis to promote the excellence, community engagement, and professional development of its members.

The University of Memphis **Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change** aims to preserve the historical record of the American Civil Rights Movement and to facilitate conversations and collaborations that address contemporary issues of disparities that deny individuals full rights to participate in society. Established in 1996 as a public policy research center, the Institute was named in honor of Dr. Hooks, a native Memphian, a prominent leader in the Movement, and a 2007 recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

The **Department of Art** at the University of Memphis is accredited by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design, and by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The department provides depth of choice, successful professional faculty, challenging programs, and a supportive environment.

The **Department of Architecture** at the University of Memphis prepares students to enter the professional practice of architecture or interior design and to serve the Memphis and Mid-South region through research, engaged scholarship, interdisciplinary collaboration, and creative expression that contributes to sustainable, stable communities and enhances the quality of life for all citizens.

Photo credit: Photo of Paul R. Williams, 1951, Herald Examiner Collection, Los Angeles Public Library