

Art Museum unveils Paul R. Williams project

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It took four years of patient labor to accumulate enough submissions from individuals to open the Paul R. Williams exhibit at the Art Museum of The University of Memphis.

Set to open Sept. 24, the project will continue through Jan. 15, 2011 when it will hit the road as a traveling exhibit.

The project began as a way to honor the prominent black architect, whose reputation flourished during the mid-20th century.

"African Americans were not welcome in the places he built," said Leslie Luebbers, director of AMUM. "He couldn't go to those places as a patron."

The organization began collecting media in 2006 when The American Institute of Architects chose a Memphian member's idea for their 150 anniversary celebration, but a shortage of information threatened to halt the project early on.

"There has to be thousands of places around the world on the other end of his contracts and everything he did," Luebbers said. "We are hoping that those little places will come to us and help build the archive. To some extent, that's happening."

The archive consists of historical photographs, current photographs of restored residential homes, personal photographs of Williams and background stories of his work.

"As an African American, (Williams) was able to have a real diverse group of clients and was able to be incredibly successful during the time he practiced architecture," said Jimmie Tucker, adjunct architecture professor at The U of M. "He was a very prolific designer, so I think that there's a lot to be learned from his work."

Tucker said that students will obtain a clearer insight of how others achieve strong architectural jobs by visiting the upcoming exhibit.

"They gain a better understanding of how they can better their own careers," Tucker said. "I think that can be very valuable."

A K-12 program developed with the project allows students to learn about the architect from a young age.

Mario Walker, graduate assistant at The University's architecture department, said he is very excited that The U of M is taking part in the project.

"(Students) think it's a great idea and are very excited about being a part of it," Walker said. "We're

interacting with (K-12 students), telling them about Paul Williams and showing them some of his work."

Since most people do not know about him, Walker said by teaching grade school students about Williams, it spreads his name to the public.

"It's to get them to know who this guy is," Walker said. "Especially to kids who are interested in architecture."

Luebbers said their overall hope is to provide research material and some momentum, and let people take it away.

"I think the exhibition will be a good thing," Luebbers said. "But, I think the research with this is far greater."

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