



North Carolina Museum of Art

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North Carolina Museum of Art to Host Exhibition on Architect Phil Freelon

Exhibition highlights the career of the storied NC architect who designed the National Museum of African American History and Culture in DC

Raleigh, N.C.—The North Carolina Museum of Art (NCMA) will host [Container/Contained: Phil Freelon Design Strategies for Telling African American Stories](#) February 26 through May 15, 2022. The exhibition celebrates the accomplished North Carolina architect Philip G. Freelon (1953–2019) and his remarkable career of over four decades designing public buildings with his firm, The Freelon Group, and later as design director of Perkins&Will North Carolina.

“We’re honored to help tell the story of Phil Freelon and his incredible accomplishments. The symbolism and metaphors in the buildings he designed celebrate Black communities and histories in a lasting way,” said Museum Director Valerie Hillings. “Freelon served on the North Carolina Museum of Art Foundation Board from 2008 to 2012, so we are especially pleased to present this exhibition focused on his groundbreaking career.”

This exhibition, organized by a team of faculty and students led by Dr. Emily Makas from the School of Architecture at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, debuted at the [Harvey B. Gantt Center for African American Arts and Culture](#) in Charlotte, NC. It examines Freelon’s work, which includes museums, libraries, cultural centers, and public parks, with a focus on projects that embrace Black communities and identities. Freelon often noted that architecture should be more than a container—it should help tell the story of and be integral to the content of public institutions. To explore the relationship between the container and the contained in Freelon’s architecture, this exhibition analyzes connections among the forms, materials, and meanings of his projects and the histories and cultures they celebrate.



Freelon’s notable designs include the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC; the National Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta; the

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Museum of the African Diaspora in San Francisco; the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African American Arts and Culture in Charlotte; the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum in Jackson; and the forthcoming Freedom Park in Raleigh. Freelon and his team drew on histories of neighborhoods, connections to African American communities, and African pasts to create designs rooted firmly in place and time. Activism and celebration of heritage are subtly present in Freelon's work. He was a master of formal symbolism and design metaphors that are thoughtful and thought-provoking and reference culture and history. Freelon's work, for example, examines the multiple functions and meanings of skin—as both a protective covering and a visual form of identification. In his designs for African American communities and institutions, he expanded the idea of skin with complex building exteriors that explore the use of color, pattern, and material.

The exhibition is free to visit; no tickets required.

About the Exhibition

Container/Contained: Phil Freelon Design Strategies for Telling African American Stories was researched, curated, and designed by a team of faculty and students led by Dr. Emily Makas from the School of Architecture at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. This work was made possible by support from UNC Charlotte's School of Architecture, College of Arts and Architecture, Chancellor's Diversity Grant Program, and Office of Undergraduate Research, as well as from Perkins&Will. In Raleigh additional support for this exhibition is made possible, in part, by the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources; the North Carolina Museum of Art Foundation, Inc.; and the William R. Kenan Jr. Endowment for Educational Exhibitions. Research for this exhibition was made possible by Ann and Jim Goodnight/The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Fund for Curatorial and Conservation Research and Travel.

Image Caption:

Noah Willman, *Phil Freelon*, Courtesy of Perkins&Will; © 2021 Noah Willman

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About the North Carolina Museum of Art

The North Carolina Museum of Art's collection spans more than 5,000 years, from antiquity to the present, making the institution one of the premier art museums in the South. The Museum's collection provides educational, aesthetic, intellectual, and cultural experiences for the citizens of North Carolina and beyond. The 164-acre Museum Park showcases the connection between art and nature through site-specific works of environmental art. The Museum offers changing special exhibitions, classes, lectures, family activities, films, and concerts.

The Museum is located at 2110 Blue Ridge Road in Raleigh and is home to the People's Collection. It is the art museum of the State of North Carolina, under the auspices of Governor Roy Cooper; an agency of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, guided by the direction of Secretary D. Reid Wilson; and led by Director Valerie Hillings.