

Support Materials for the Janna Ireland on the Architectural Legacy of Paul R. Williams in Nevada Exhibition
Collection CAE2227

Introduction/Abstract

Photographer Janna Ireland traveled throughout the State of Nevada in 2021 – 2022 to photograph buildings designed by renowned Black architect Paul R. Williams, which were displayed in 2022 at the Nevada Museum of Art. Materials in this archive were collected to provide supporting documentation for the projects represented in the exhibition.

Biographical Note: Janna Ireland

Janna Ireland was born in Philadelphia in 1985 and earned a BFA at New York University, from their Tisch School of the Arts, Department of Photography and Imaging. She went on to get an MFA from UCLA and now works as an assistant professor in the Department of Art and Art History at Occidental College. In 2000 she published a book of images of the architectural work by the well-known Black architect Paul Revere Williams, *Regarding Paul R. Williams: A Photographer's View*. Ireland, who approaches Williams' architecture from a fine arts perspective, created photographs that highlighted the intimate interior and exterior details of his buildings, bringing her own poetic response to Williams' work. Ireland's book documents Williams' work in Southern California, which ranged in architectural style from Spanish Mediterranean to Modern.

In 2021 she was named Peter E. Pool Fellow of the Center for Art + Environment to extend her coverage of his career in Nevada, including Las Vegas, Reno, and Lovelock. In 2022, the Museum organized a major exhibition celebrating Williams through her work.

Biographical Note: Paul Revere Williams

Paul Revere Williams (1894 – 1980) was born in Los Angeles as the younger of two boys. Unfortunately, both their parents had died of tuberculosis by 1898, when the Paul was only age four. Raised by a foster family, he drew constantly and developed an interest in architecture when in high school. After high school, he enrolled in the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design Atelier in Los Angeles to expand his drawing skills. At the age of 20, he enrolled in architectural engineering at the University of Southern California (USC). After graduating, Williams accepted a job at Wilbur D. Cook, followed by Reginald Davis Johnson, Arthur F. Kelly, and John C. Austin. In 1922, after passing the state architecture exams and receiving his professional license, he opened his own practice.

Starting off as a relatively unknown architect was difficult as well-established firms tended to get commercial commissions for Los Angeles, and residential commissions tended to go to architects with social connections. But John C. Austin passed a residential commission for a house in Hancock Park to Williams to get him started. Williams' former classmate Louis Cass commissioned him to design his house in the Flintridge community. These major projects and others launched his practice. By the end of the 1920s, Williams had established himself as a sophisticated designer of homes for the upper-middle class and the wealthy. In 1932, ninety percent of Williams' work was residential, but by 1940, sixty percent of his work was commercial. Williams had founded his practice on the concept that his success and value depended on listening carefully to his clients and delivering what they wanted. This client-focused approach was key to his success.

Angeles Planning Commission beginning in 1920 and was appointed to other state commissions including California Housing Commission and the California Redevelopment Commission, and numerous national or

Presidential commissions, as well as serving on the boards of historically Black Universities. Williams believed that public housing projects were another way to serve others and worked as the chief architect for the Pueblo del Rio Defense Housing Project in Southern Los Angeles, as well as Nickerson Gardens in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles.

Williams' architectural body of work in Nevada includes residential homes that were designed to enrich the lives of all community members, commercial properties, and religious institutions. His most notable buildings include the La Concha Motel (now part of the Neon Museum) in Las Vegas, and the First Church of Christ, Scientist (now known as the Lear Theater) in Reno. Williams was first introduced to northern Nevada in the 1930s by Luella Garvey, for whom he designed a house in Reno in 1934. Other residential and lodging properties in northern Nevada designed by Williams include the El Reno Apartments in Reno, the Lovelock Inn and Tharpe/Brinkerhoff House in Lovelock, and E.L. Cord's Circle L Ranch House in the Fish Lake Valley. In southern Nevada, Williams also designed the Guardian Angel Cathedral, the Royal Nevada Casino (no longer extant) and Berkley Square—Southern Nevada's first African American suburban community.

In 1957 Williams became the first African American to become an AIA (American Institute of Architects) Fellow. In 2017, he was posthumously awarded the AIA's 2017 Gold Medal, the highest honor for an architect in the United States. He is the first African American to receive the medal.

Scope and Content

Photographer and Peter E. Pool Center for Art + Environment Fellow, Janna Ireland, traveled throughout the State of Nevada in 2021 – 2022 to photograph buildings designed by renowned Black architect Paul R. Williams, which were displayed in 2022 at the Nevada Museum of Art.

The materials in this archive, which were collected to provide supporting documentation for the projects represented in the exhibition, are a small collection of documents and ephemera exhibited in the Janna Ireland and the Legacy of Paul R. Williams exhibition, from July 2 – October 2, 2022, at Nevada Museum of Art, Reno, Nevada.

This archive is currently in process.