LACMA

PRESS RELEASE

Three Major Los Angeles Art Institutions Celebrate Paul R. Williams

Getty, LACMA, and USC Fisher Museum of Art present a landmark, multi-site exhibition series honoring the life and work of groundbreaking pioneering architect Paul R. Williams.

(Image captions on page 4)

(Los Angeles, CA—February 18, 2026) From August 2026 through July 2027, three major Los Angeles art institutions—Getty, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), and USC Fisher Museum of Art—will present a coordinated series of exhibitions celebrating the life and work of groundbreaking architect Paul R. Williams (1894–1980).

A pivotal yet long-underrecognized figure in twentieth-century architecture and civil rights advocacy, Williams was the first Black architect licensed west of the Mississippi, the first Black member of the American Institute of Architects nationwide, and the first Black architect to be awarded the AIA's highest honor, the Gold Medal, in 2017. Over a career spanning nearly six decades, he designed more than 3,000 projects, making him one of the most prolific and influential architects of his time.

Drawing from the Paul R. Williams Archive—jointly acquired in 2020 by the Getty Research Institute and the USC School of Architecture—the exhibitions present architectural drawings, photographs, plans, and memorabilia, many on view for the first time. Together, they reveal Williams's role as both a central figure in the canon of

global modern architecture and a socially conscious practitioner whose work profoundly reshaped Los Angeles.

Williams designed iconic projects for institutions and clients ranging from the Beverly Hills Hotel to the US Navy, alongside extravagant homes for Hollywood stars such as Frank Sinatra and Lucille Ball. Equally significant was his work for and with Los Angeles's Black community, including First African Methodist Episcopal Church, Second Baptist Church, and the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company—buildings that fostered communal strength and financial opportunity during an era of racialized segregation and exclusion. Williams also collaborated on major civic projects like the Downtown Civic Center and Los Angeles International Airport, and he served on Los Angeles's City Planning Commission, the California State Redevelopment Agency, and the Federal Advisory Committee on Government Housing Policies and Programs. Williams's impactful work garnered him the prestigious NAACP Spingarn Medal, honorary doctorates from Howard University and Tuskegee Institute, and USC's Alumni Award.

Exhibition Details

"Paul R. Williams: An Architect Considered"
USC Fisher Museum of Art
August 18, 2026–March 13, 2027

Organized jointly by the USC School of Architecture and the USC Fisher Museum of Art, this exhibition examines Paul R. Williams's major contributions to modern multifamily housing. It pairs original archival drawings with newly commissioned works by contemporary artists and architects. Highlighting 35 housing projects from Williams's 60-year career, the show emphasizes the designer's sustained commitment to innovative, dignified solutions for collective living during a period of rapid urbanization. Seven new commissions—by Edgar Arceneaux; Current Interests (Matthew Au and Mira Henry); enFOLD Collective (Dana McKinney White and Megan Echols); Darell W. Fields; David Hartt; Cory Henry; and Amanda Williams—extend Williams's legacy into the present, offering fresh perspectives on his influence on architectural history and modern housing.

Significant funding has been provided by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Guest Curators: Valery Augustin, Milton S. F. Curry, Amy Murphy

"Paul R. Williams: Architect for Living"
Los Angeles County Museum of Art
November 15, 2026–May 23, 2027

The most prominent Black American architect of his generation, Paul R. Williams

helped shape his native Los Angeles during its rapid growth from the 1920s through the early 1970s. Acclaimed as an architect to the stars, he brought his innovation and rigor to stylistically diverse residential, civic, commercial, religious, and hospitality projects that ranged from ambitious public housing to iconic hotels in Southern California, Las Vegas, and Latin America. *Paul R. Williams: Architect for Living* demonstrates the impressive breadth of Williams's contributions, showcasing never-before-exhibited drawings and photographs from his archive.

Curators: Staci Steinberger, Sarah Locke

"Paul R. Williams: Architecture Across the Color Line"
Getty Research Institute
December 15, 2026–July 18, 2027

Groundbreaking architect Paul R. Williams charted an unprecedented career. The first Black architect licensed in the western US, Williams was a prolific, transformative figure, but his role constructing for and with Black communities across the color line has been little accounted for. Marking the public debut of his archive, this exhibition examines the impact of Williams's architecture in challenging systems of racialized exclusion, offering an intimate portrait of life, hope, and possibility coursing through the collective construction of the architecture of Black Los Angeles. It attests to architecture's capacity to give rise to community, to construct social opportunities, and to give shape to Black spatial imaginaries—legacies that extend to this day.

Curators: LeRonn P. Brooks, Maristella Casciato, Gary Riichirō Fox, Alex Jones

Together, these exhibitions form the first major museum presentations devoted to Paul R. Williams. Accompanied by a scholarly catalogue, digital exhibition, and public programs, the collaboration highlights his extraordinary career, enduring influence, and lasting impact on architecture locally and globally.

Getty is a leading global arts organization committed to the exhibition, conservation, and understanding of the world's artistic and cultural heritage. Based in Los Angeles, Getty's Foundation, Conservation Institute, Museum, and Research Institute work collaboratively with partners around the world. Getty shares art, knowledge, and resources online at Getty.edu and welcomes the public for free at its Getty Center and the Getty Villa.

Established in 1939, **the USC Fisher Museum of Art** is the oldest art museum in Los Angeles and a vital part of USC's cultural and academic life. Known for its foundational collection of European and American art from the Renaissance to the 20th century, the museum has evolved into a dynamic space that champions contemporary artists and critical discourse. Through groundbreaking exhibitions, scholarly collaborations, and community-centered programs, the Fisher Museum advances conversations at the intersection of art, equity, and social change, reaffirming its commitment to inclusivity and to challenging conventional narratives within the museum field.

About LACMA: Located on the Pacific Rim, LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection of more than 150,000 objects that illuminate 6,000 years of artistic expression across the globe. Committed to showcasing a multitude of art histories, LACMA exhibits and interprets works of art from new and unexpected points of view that are informed by the region's rich cultural heritage and diverse population. LACMA's spirit of experimentation is reflected in its work with artists, technologists, and thought leaders as well as in its regional, national, and global partnerships to share collections and programs, create pioneering initiatives, and engage new audiences.

Location: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036. lacma.org

Image caption: *First African Methodist Episcopal Church of Los Angeles* (exterior rendering), 1965, by Paul R. Williams, (American, 1894-1980), ink on paper. Getty Research Institute & USC School of Architecture, 2020.M.6. © Della M. Williams Trust Dated December 15, 1988.

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