

UC SANTA BARBARA

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Exhibition at Art, Design & Architecture Museum Highlights Work of Architects Whitney Smith and Wayne Williams

From 1946 to 1973, Whitney Smith and his partner, Wayne Williams, designed more than 800 projects, including residential, commercial, and public buildings, as well as housing tracts, multiuse complexes, parks and master plans for cities. Widely published in the popular and architectural press from the 1940's through the 1960's, their work received more than 40 awards.

An exhibition at the UC Santa Barbara Art, Design & Architecture Museum examines Smith and Williams's designs as a quintessential expression of postwar California ideas about the relationship of architecture to environment, of building to site, of inside to outside.

"Outside In: The Architecture of Smith and Williams," features holdings from the Smith and Williams archive (1926-1989) in the museum's Architecture and Design Collection. The archive documents more than 800 designs of architectural excellence, which reveal an extraordinary sensitivity to the client and the building site. The exhibition and forthcoming catalog examine Smith and Williams's work in the context of their Southern California contemporaries, such as Gregory Ain, Julius R. Davidson, Raphael Soriano, Thornton Abell, Maynard Lyndon, and the modern

landscape architect Garrett Eckbo, who worked with many of these figures.

With plywood walls, screens, and lattices that connect one gallery to another, the ideas of the exhibition are embodied in the design installation. "We've actually taken elements from Smith and Williams designs," said Jocelyn Gibbs, curator of the Architecture and Design Collection. "Smith and Williams took such joy in their work. There's a sense of materiality. They loved to build things, and you can see that in the exhibition."

Installed in two galleries, the exhibition begins with Whitney Smith's early work, moves to Smith and Williams's residential work, and continues through their commercial and civic building designs. It concludes with highlights from the individual careers each pursued when their partnership dissolved in 1973. One media slide show features images of their work, and another presents a slide lecture Whitney gave in the 1970's about architects preceded him in the Pasadena area during the 1920's and 1930's. "It provides additional context about his place in architecture," Gibbs said.

The crises of the Depression and World War II, along with government and private responses to these tumultuous events, form the backdrop of Smith and Williams' work. The large number of houses and commercial buildings they designed in the post-war years speaks to the growing opportunity and prosperity in Southern California. Their work illustrates their success in selling modernism to a growing middle-class, noted Gibbs. "What sets their designs apart are the refined and subtle ways in which landscape is incorporated into the architecture. The designs deserve, and reward, close scrutiny," she said.

"Outside In: The Architecture of Smith and Williams" is part of Pacific Standard Time Presents: Modern Architecture in L.A. This collaboration, initiated by the Getty, brings together several local cultural institutions for a wide-ranging look at the postwar built environment of the city as a whole, from its famous residential architecture to its vast freeway network, revealing in new ways the city's development and ongoing impact. The exhibition at the UCSB Art, Design & Architecture Museum is one of 11 exhibitions in nine venues throughout the Los Angeles area.

One of the largest architecture collections in North America -- and the most important archive for Southern California's architectural history -- UCSB's

Architecture and Design Collection has a broad and deep focus on the history of design in Southern California from the late 19th to the 21st century. It contains more than 1,000,000 drawings, as well as papers, photographs, models, decorative objects, and furniture. Among its holdings are the R.M. Schindler Archive, ca. 1916-1954; the papers of Santa Barbara architect George Washington Smith and of Luta Marie Riggs, who studied architecture at UC Berkeley in the 1920's and worked with Smith until his death in 1930; the papers of early modernists Gregory Ain, Irving Gill, and J.R. Davidson; and the archive of Barton Myers, a contemporary architect who has built homes all over the world and lives in Santa Barbara.

"The collection was begun in the early 1960's by David Gebhard, who was an art history professor here beginning in the 1960's," said Gibbs. "He sought out architects and acquired their papers and drawings. As a result, the archive includes many of the most significant architects of early modernism in California."

"Outside In: The Architecture of Smith and Williams" continues through June 16. The Art, Design & Architecture Museum is open from noon to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday. Admission is free.

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