



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## PROCLAMATION TO NAME FEBRUARY 18 AS PAUL REVERE WILLIAMS DAY IN NEVADA

*The Nevada Museum of Art, The Neon Museum, the Nevada State Museum, Las Vegas and the Nevada Preservation Foundation work together to celebrate the legacy of architect Paul Revere Williams.*

**Las Vegas, Nev. (February 1, 2023)** – The character of a neighborhood or city comes not only from the people who live there, but also from those who design its residential, commercial and public spaces. The built environment in Nevada—especially Las Vegas—owes its unique look and feel to architect Paul Revere Williams (1894 – 1980), the first licensed African American architect to work in the western region of the United States and the first black recipient of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) Gold Medal award. In Las Vegas, some of his most recognizable contributions to the landscape include the Guardian Angel Cathedral, Berkley Square/Highlands Square and the La Concha Motel whose lobby now serves as the visitors' center at The Neon Museum.

The Nevada Museum of Art, The Neon Museum, the Nevada State Museum, Las Vegas and the Nevada Preservation Foundation have combined efforts to bring visibility to Williams and his many architectural achievements in Northern, Central and Southern Nevada while celebrating the achievements of his remarkable career.

At 10 am on Saturday, February 18, a representative from the Office of the Governor will issue a proclamation officially naming February 18 as “Paul Revere Williams Day” in Nevada. On this day, we also celebrate the birthday of Paul Revere Williams. The ceremony will be held at The Neon Museum.

Notably, The Neon Museum Visitors’ Center boasts the distinctive shell-shape design created by Williams. This building was originally the iconic La Concha Motel, one of Williams’ many architectural achievements. Following the official proclamation, a representative from the Office of Nevada Senator Rosen will issue two congressional commendations: one to the family of Paul R. Williams and the other to artist and educator Janna Ireland whose photographic study is featured in the exhibition *Janna Ireland on the Architectural Legacy of Paul Revere Williams in Nevada*. Tracing Williams’ influence on the built environment of the state, the exhibition, which was organized by the Nevada Museum of Art, is currently on view at the Nevada State Museum, Las Vegas.

### **Stewarding the Past, Present and Future**

The proclamation of an official Paul Revere Williams Day is the latest effort of this combined endeavor to bring to light the history and legacy of the “Architect of the Stars” in the silver state.

“The Neon Museum is proud to partner with the Nevada Museum of Art, the Nevada State Museum, Las Vegas and the Nevada Preservation Foundation to continue to bring to light the rich history and untold stories of our region. As the steward of one of the most recognizable and notable designs by Williams, we are honored to invite our community to engage with and find inspiration in the work of Paul R. Williams,” said Aaron Berger, Director of The Neon Museum.

Built in 1961, the La Concha Motel features a graceful curvilinear form that echo the arched entries, staircases, and ceilings of the residencies that Williams designed in Southern California. Often described as an example of Google-style architecture, the building was inspired by the sleek futurism of the Space Age and Atomic Age. It’s no surprise that the La Concha Motel became a favorite destination of the rich and famous, including Elizabeth Taylor, Ronald Reagan, Wayne Newton, Elvis, Ann-Margret, Flip Wilson and the Carpenters. The La Concha Motel operated as a motel from 1961 to 2004 and was razed in 2005 to make way for new development. The lobby of the La Concha was salvaged in 2005 by Nevada preservationists and was moved in 2006 to serve as the visitor center for The Neon Museum. In 2015, the La Concha Motel lobby was listed on the Nevada State Register of Historic Places.

To align Williams’ name with the rich and famous is common in his impressive biography; and yet, even at the height of his career, Williams wasn’t always welcome in the buildings he designed or the neighborhoods where he built homes because of his race. Despite all of this, Williams persisted in building private residences and public housing first in Los Angeles and then in Northern, Central and Southern Nevada, inspired by the belief that everyone deserved a dignified place to live. In 1923, Williams became the first black member of the American Institute of Architects (AIA). It wasn’t until 2017, nearly 40 years after his death, that he would receive the AIA Gold Medal. Yet, his remarkable career and many accomplishments are undeniable.

“To explore Williams’ work in Nevada is to recognize the breadth of his creative range and to examine a transformational era in the state’s history,” said Nevada Museum of Art CEO David Walker. “Through this proclamation, we hope to bring this remarkable architect’s works and life to public consciousness, and to tell yet another fascinating aspect of Nevada history in a new light.”

### **A Reason to Celebrate Paul Revere Williams in Nevada**

Through a career that spanned more than fifty years and the creation of more than 3,000 buildings, Williams’ imprint on the state is undeniable. In Las Vegas alone, he built some of the city’s most iconic structures and neighborhoods, including Berkley Square—the first African American suburban community where residents of color could purchase a home in Las Vegas. The project remains the first subdivision in Nevada history constructed by a Black architect for the Black community and continues to be an important piece of historic

Westside Las Vegas. Other prominent projects include Carver Park, Guardian Angel Cathedral, the Royal Nevada Casino (no longer extant) and, of course, the iconic La Concha Motel.

“Our collective organizations share a commitment to highlighting the stories of under-recognized individuals as well as a passion for Paul Revere Williams’ contributions to the fabric of Las Vegas architecture,” said Berger. “This proclamation is not simply recognition of Williams’ impact as an innovative and versatile architect but also as an individual who broke barriers and opened doors in our community and our state. February 18, Williams’ birthday, is a day to honor a torchbearer who advanced our society through his work and perseverance. This proclamation will credit Williams’ accomplishments and serve as an inspiration for generations to come.”

Following the proclamation, families are invited to join The Neon Museum for a special STEAM Saturday celebrating renowned architect Paul Revere Williams’ birthday, diving into his life and achievements. Guests can view images of his buildings, step into the La Concha Lobby he designed and create their own dream home blueprints. As Williams designed almost every type of building found in a community, attendees will be able to take inspiration from his work, sketch the front view of their dream home and create its floor plan. There will also have a scavenger hunt, building stations, and a reading corner featuring *Curve & Flow: The Elegant Vision of L.A. Architect Paul R. Williams* by Andrea J. Loney.

The Neon Museum’s STEAM Saturdays offer fun and hands-on set of activities, presentations and demonstrations designed to promote creative and critical thinking.

*This series is offered each month to families every second Saturday from 10 a.m. - Noon, weather permitting.*

Also, a Symposium will be held at the Nevada State Museum, Las Vegas, Friday, February 17.

For more information, [follow this link to the full exhibition Press Kit](#).

Learn more about the exhibition and accompanying research at: <https://alegacyrevered.org>

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## SPONSORS

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**Media Sponsor** Vegas PBS

## COMMUNITY PARTNERS

*This exhibition is organized by the Nevada Museum of Art and curated by Carmen Beals. We thank spokesperson Claytee White, scholarly contributors Alicia Barber and Brooke Hodge, and community partners: Our Story, Inc., KME Architects, LGA Architects, and the National Pan-Hellenic Council, Las Vegas. Special thanks to The Neon Museum and the Nevada Preservation Foundation for additional collaboration.*

## TOUR

Janna Ireland on the Architectural Legacy of Paul Revere Williams in Nevada will travel to the Nevada State Museum, 309 S. Valley View Blvd, in Las Vegas, NV for presentation December 3, 2022, through May 30, 2023. Additional Information can be found at [lasvegasnvmuseum.org](http://lasvegasnvmuseum.org).

## IMAGE CAPTIONS

From left to right: Janna Ireland, *Paul Revere Williams' La Concha Motel, Las Vegas, Nevada, 1961, 2022*, chromogenic print. Photograph courtesy of the artist, with permission from The Neon Museum, Las Vegas. Janna Ireland, *Guardian Angel Cathedral, Las Vegas, Nevada, 1963, 2021*, chromogenic print. Photograph courtesy of the artist. Janna Ireland, *Guardian Angel Cathedral, Las Vegas, Nevada, 1963, 2021*, chromogenic print. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

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**The Nevada Museum of Art** is the only art museum in Nevada accredited by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). A private, nonprofit organization founded in 1931, the statewide institution is supported by its membership as well as sponsorships, gifts and grants. Through its permanent collections, original exhibitions and programming, and E.L. Cord Museum School, the Nevada Museum of Art provides meaningful opportunities for people to engage with a range of art and education experiences. The Museum's **Center for Art + Environment** is an internationally recognized research center dedicated to supporting the practice, study, and awareness of creative interactions between people and their environments. The Center houses unique archive materials from more than 1,000 artists working on all seven continents, including Cape Farewell, Michael Heizer, Walter de Maria, Lita Albuquerque, Burning Man, the Center for Land Use Interpretation, Great Basin Native Artists Archive, Ugo Rondinone's *Seven Magic Mountains*, and Trevor Paglen's *Orbital Reflector*. Learn more at [nevadaart.org](http://nevadaart.org).

#### **Land Acknowledgement**

The Nevada Museum of Art is located in the Great Basin on the occupied territories of Indigenous people. The state of Nevada consists of 28 federally recognized tribes from four nations: the *Numu* (Northern Paiute), *Newe* (Western Shoshone), *Wa She Shu* (Washoe), and *Nuwu* (Southern Paiute). We acknowledge that more can be done to further research and integrate the stories of Indigenous people and cultures into our collective knowledge of the lands of this place.

#### **About the Nevada State Museum, Las Vegas**

Founded in 1982, the mission of the Nevada State Museum, Las Vegas, serves to educate a diverse public about the history and natural history of Nevada. The museum collects, preserves, exhibits, and disseminates material that contributes to an understanding and appreciation of the state. For more information, visit <https://www.lasvegasmuseum.org/>

#### **About The Neon Museum**

Founded in 1996, The Neon Museum is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization dedicated to collecting, preserving, studying, and exhibiting iconic Las Vegas signs for educational, historic, arts and cultural enrichment. In 2021, The Neon Museum achieved accreditation by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), the highest national recognition bestowed to museums in the United States. On its 2.27-acre campus, The Neon Museum has an outdoor exhibition space known as the Neon Boneyard ("boneyard" is traditionally the name for an area where items no longer in use are stored); the North Gallery, home to the immersive audiovisual experience "Brilliant!" which uses technology to re-illuminate more than 40 non-operational signs; the Boulevard Gallery outdoor exhibit and event space; and its visitors' center inside the former La Concha Motel lobby. The museum collection also includes nine restored signs installed as public art in downtown Las Vegas. Public education, outreach, research, and arts preservation represent a selection of the museum's ongoing projects.

#### **Nevada Preservation Foundation**

Nevada Preservation Foundation is a small non-profit foundation founded in 2014. Our mission is to preserve and revitalize historic buildings and places in Nevada and to cultivate a presence around cultural heritage and tourism. Our programming is produced and delivered by our small staff and large group of dedicated volunteers.