

10-1-2017

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Public Affairs, Roger Williams University

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Recommended Citation

Public Affairs, Roger Williams University, "Internationally Award-Winning Architects to Speak at RWU on Oct. 25" (2017). *Featured News Story*. 252.

https://docs.rwu.edu/weekatroger_featured_news/252

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Internationally Award-Winning Architects to Speak at RWU on Oct. 25

Community invited to hear architects Tod Williams and Billie Tsien share the philosophy, experience and vision of their practice



October 1, 2017 | Public Affairs

BRISTOL, R.I. – Internationally award-winning architect team Tod Williams and Billie Tsien will visit Roger Williams University to discuss their optimistic architectural philosophy and share how this has helped to shape the institutional and public projects they build.

On Wednesday, Oct. 25, members of the campus community and the public are invited to spend an evening with Williams and Tsien – who were selected last year as the designers of the [Obama Presidential Center](#) – as part of RWU’s President’s Distinguished Speaker Series and the *Talking About Race, Gender and Power* series, which aims to engage the community in informed dialogue on the intersection of race, gender and power in America.

In their presentation, “Optimism,” Williams and Tsien will explore how their design process has helped to create buildings of purpose that are deeply rooted to a place and built to serve generations to come.

“Williams and Tsien have designed several of the most important works of architecture in the U.S. over the past 30 years,” said Stephen White, dean of the [School of Architecture, Art and Historical Preservation](#) at RWU. “Their work is inventive, with beautifully made and lit spaces, addressing unique situations for the Neurosciences Institute in La Jolla, the Folk Art Museum in New York, and

Barnes Museum in Philadelphia, and they are now are at work on the design for the Obama Presidential Center in Chicago. Their projects involve some of the most important cultural undertakings in our country in recent years, and their architecture contributes significantly to the sense of place, beauty and meanings of these institutions.”

Williams and Tsien began working together in 1977 and founded their architectural practice in 1986. Located in New York, their studio focuses on work for institutions, including schools, museums, and not-for-profits – all for organizations and people who share their values of aspiration, meaning, timelessness and beauty. Their design process engages the client, site and builder to effectively articulate the institution’s mission and legacy. While facing complex programs, histories and politics, a central thought helps to guide their designs from the inside out and ultimately transcend each project’s expectations and challenges.

Over the past three decades, Williams and Tsien have received numerous national and international citations. In 2013, they received the National Medal of the Arts from President Obama and Firm of the Year Award from the American Institute of Architects. Notable projects include the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia, Asia Society Center in Hong Kong, LeFrak Center in Brooklyn’s Prospect Park, and Logan Center for the Arts at the University of Chicago. Last year, they were selected to design the Obama Presidential Center.

Williams was born in Detroit, MI and received his MFA and Master of Architecture from Princeton University, and is a trustee of the American Academy in Rome. Tsien was born in Ithaca, NY and received her undergraduate degree in Fine Arts from Yale University and Master of Architecture degree from UCLA. She is the current President of The Architectural League of New York. Outside the studio, they are active participants in a broad cultural community and maintain long-standing associations with many organizations devoted to the arts. At various times, they have taught at the Cooper Union, Harvard University, Cornell University, Yale University, and the University of Michigan. As both educators and practitioners, they are dedicated to creating a better world through architecture.

Their Oct. 25 speech will take place at 7 p.m. on RWU’s Bristol campus in the Campus Recreation Center Gymnasium. The event is free and open to the public; no tickets are required. For more information, call (401) 254-3166.

Launched in 2011, the President’s Distinguished Speakers Series at RWU invites thought leaders from a wide range of disciplines to share perspectives, inspire conversations and enrich the intellectual lives of students, faculty and staff as well as members of the local community. Each guest is invited to devote much of the daylong visit to direct engagement with students in classroom sessions, offering RWU students unique opportunities for one-on-one interactions with some of the world’s leading authors, scholars, artists and public servants.

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