



Pennsylvania Academy
of the Fine Arts

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 29, 2023

**The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts
Opens *Determined To Be: The Sculpture of John Rhoden*,
the First Comprehensive Retrospective of
African American Sculptor John Rhoden**

Exhibition runs October 5, 2023-April 7, 2024

PHILADELPHIA – Aug 29, 2023 - The [Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts](#) (PAFA) celebrates 20th century African American sculptor **John Rhoden** (1916-2001) with the exhibition, [Determined To Be: The Sculpture of John Rhoden](#), the first comprehensive retrospective of the artist's work. The exhibition, curated by **Dr. Brittany Webb**, the Evelyn and Will Kaplan Curator of Twentieth Century Art and the John Rhoden Collection at PAFA, **opens October 5, 2023 and is on view through April 7, 2024**. In 2017 PAFA was selected by the John Rhoden Estate to assume the responsibility of preserving and promoting John Rhoden's artistic legacy. The [Rhoden Collection](#) includes over 300 works of art and 22 linear feet of archival materials

Born in Birmingham, Alabama, Rhoden discovered a talent and passion for sculpting during his youth, was mentored and advised by artists in the South before moving to New York in the late 1930s and made a life in the arts when opportunities for artists of color were still very limited. PAFA's definitive monographic exhibition and catalogue will include scholarship based on new archival information, presenting Rhoden's arc from modest background to world-traveling artist. It presents 70 of Rhoden's sculptures in bronze, wood, and stone, highlighting relationships that defined and supported Rhoden's life and charts his career noting relationships to key figures and institutions in 20th century American art.

"We're excited to present *Determined to Be: The Sculpture of John Rhoden* to our audiences," says **PAFA President and CEO Eric Pryor**. "This unique exhibition, the culmination of years of dedicated work by our staff, continues PAFA's long tradition of contributing to and expanding the diverse history of American art, while shining a light on a less well-known African American artist and bringing new stories to our visitors."

Adds **Webb**, "John Rhoden was a prolific sculptor whose talent and drive sent him around the world and back. His story is as big as his over-life sized sculptures, and I'm thrilled that we all have the opportunity to get more familiar with his work and his legacy through this exhibition."

A World War II veteran, John Rhoden attended Talladega College and later the New School for Social Research and Columbia University. He subsequently won scholarships to the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture and a Fulbright Fellowship. He was the first Black visual artist fellow at The American Academy of Rome, exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Whitney Museum of Art, and won major awards including the Tiffany Award for Sculpture and the Rome Prize. In a 1966 interview about his practice, Rhoden said "I put every feeling, every passion—everything I have—into sculpting. Someone once asked me why I do it: there are so many easier things. I can only say this: sculpting is my

life.” In 1985 the Birmingham Museum of Art mounted a survey of Rhoden’s work until that point in his life. Visit the John Rhoden Digital Archives for a [full biography](#).

The exhibition will be accompanied by a robust schedule of public programming, educational activities, and special events. Themes of the exhibition, catalogue and programs include:

- Varied experiences with blackness in the American North and South, Europe, and Asia;
- The productive frictions of human migration in advancing modern culture and artistic innovation;
- The linkage of educational access and professional opportunity and the Black networks that evolved to sustain it, particularly after the Great Migration and Harlem Renaissance in the U.S.;
- The importance of public art commissions in the careers of artists and of monumental public sculpture as an intervention into the popular visual landscape.

Determined To Be: The Sculpture of John Rhoden is made possible thanks to the following generous supporters: Lead support and artwork provided by the **estate of Richanda Rhoden**. Major support is provided by the **Terra Foundation for American Art, William Penn Foundation**, and the **National Endowment for the Arts**. Additional support is provided by the **Wyeth Foundation for American Art** and **donors to PAFA's Special Exhibition Fund**.

Lead support for the exhibition catalogue is provided by the **Henry Luce Foundation**.

The organization of the **John Rhoden Archives at PAFA** was made possible by a grant from the **National Endowment for the Humanities: Democracy demands wisdom**.

About the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts

Founded in 1805, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts is America’s first school and museum of fine arts. A recipient of the National Medal of Arts, PAFA offers a world-class collection of American art, innovative exhibitions of historic and contemporary American art, and undergraduate and graduate programs in the fine arts. The PAFA Museum aims to tell the sweeping story of American art, expanding who has been included in the canon of art history through its collections, exhibitions, and public programs, while the College and extended classes of the School of Fine Arts educate artists with a deep understanding of traditions and the ability to challenge conventions. PAFA’s esteemed alumni include Mary Cassatt, Njideka Akunyili Crosby, Maxfield Parrish, William Glackens, Barkley L. Hendricks, Violet Oakley, Louis Kahn, David Lynch and Henry Ossawa Tanner. Learn more at [PAFA.org](#).

CALENDAR LISTING

Determined to Be: The Sculpture of John Rhoden

Thursday, October 5, 2023 – Sunday, April 7, 2024

Public opening reception 6:30-8:30 pm. Advance registration required.

Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts 118-128 N Broad Street, Philadelphia, PA
Samuel M.V. Hamilton Building

Determined To Be: The Sculpture of John Rhoden is the first major retrospective of 20th century African American sculptor John W. Rhoden (1916-2001). Featuring seventy sculptures in bronze, wood, and stone, *Determined To Be: The Sculpture of John Rhoden* will introduce visitors to a prolific, under-recognized sculptor who was determined to be an artist despite any obstacles. John Rhoden was born in Birmingham, AL, and mentored by artists in the South before he moved to New York in 1937. He served in World War II, attended Columbia University, was the first Black visual artist fellow at American Academy of Rome, exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Whitney Museum of Art, and won major awards including the Tiffany Award for Sculpture and the Rome Prize.

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