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Smithsonian American Art Museum Selects FreelandBuck Design for Site-Specific Installation in Its Renwick Gallery's Grand Salon

The Smithsonian American Art Museum has selected FreelandBuck, an architectural design practice based in New York and Los Angeles, to create a site-specific installation for the Bettie Rubenstein Grand Salon at its Renwick Gallery. The installation, titled “Parallax Gap,” is an immersive, ceiling-suspended structure exploring the interplay between architectural design, fabrication and representation.

“Parallax Gap” will be on view at the Renwick Gallery from July 1 to Feb. 11, 2018. Independent curator Helen B. Bechtel coordinated the installation.

“The way in which FreelandBuck dissolves the boundaries between different traditions of architectural practice to create something fresh and exciting aligns with the Renwick Gallery’s focus on broader interpretations of contemporary craft,” said Abraham Thomas, The Fleur and Charles Bresler Curator-in-Charge at the Renwick Gallery.

“Parallax Gap” combines the practices of drawing, fabrication and architectural design in an innovative overlap of disciplines. The work embraces both Western and Eastern concepts of perspective through trompe l’oeil effects and multiple vanishing points, creating a sense of soaring volume and the illusion of both real and abstracted architectural space. FreelandBuck selected nine different iconic American ceilings to draw—and then build—using synthetic fabric suspended in overlapping layers from the ceiling. The resulting installation is a visual puzzle that reveals itself to visitors as they move throughout the room, creating a sense of parallax where the distance and depth of the ceilings appear to vary when viewed from different lines of sight.

“‘Parallax Gap’ is a compelling example of craft in contemporary architectural representation,” Bechtel said. “FreelandBuck is bringing three-dimensional drawing to life at building scale. Within this field of experimentation, they apply methods traditionally associated with architectural drawing to the fabrication of physical structures, creating a new architectural medium.”

The nine ceilings depicted in the work represent notable 19th- and early 20th-century examples of American architecture. Several are contemporaneous with the construction of the Renwick Gallery

itself, a Second Empire-style building designed by architect James Renwick Jr. in 1858 and now a National Historic Landmark.

“Parallax Gap” is the Renwick’s first foray into commissioning examples of large-scale works that present a creative approach to craft within the field of architecture. The museum’s 2015 exhibition “WONDER” demonstrated the potential for interplay between the building’s historic spaces and site-specific installations by contemporary artists. “Parallax Gap” shifts that exploration to an architectural perspective.

“We recognize that architects rarely encounter the opportunity to conduct research at a large scale, and yet, when free from the constraints of ‘real building,’ full-scale experimentation often presents the most thought-provoking work,” Thomas said. “As part of the Renwick’s engagement with ever-expanding definitions of craft, we hope to continue using the Grand Salon as a proverbial sandbox, challenging architects to bring their most compelling ideas about fabrication to life.”

FreelandBuck’s design was selected from among eight proposals from firms, including Ball-Nogues Studio, Collective-LOK, Ibañez Kim, Iwamoto Scott, Joseph Giovannini, Oyler Wu Collaborative and Matsys Studio. Each was invited to submit designs for a site-specific installation in the building’s iconic Grand Salon as part of a competition titled “ABOVE the Renwick.” An architect’s statement from FreelandBuck is available in the museum’s [online press room](#).

About the Smithsonian American Art Museum’s Renwick Gallery

The Renwick Gallery is the Smithsonian American Art Museum’s branch for contemporary craft and decorative arts. The Renwick is located on Pennsylvania Avenue at 17th Street N.W. and is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (closed Dec. 25). Admission is free. Follow the museum on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#), [Tumblr](#), [Pinterest](#), [Flickr](#), [iTunes U](#) and [ArtBabble](#). Smithsonian information: (202) 633-1000. Museum information (recorded): (202) 633-7970. Website: [americanart.si.edu](#).

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