



An image depicting "Wings of Thought," designed by acclaimed sculptor Richard Deutsch.

'Wings of Thought'

New work by acclaimed sculptor to highlight Mentors' Circle redesign

11:10 a.m., March 1, 2012--A sculpture commemorating the Rev. Francis Alison, founder of the 18th century academy that became the University of Delaware, will be installed on campus as a focal point of Mentors' Circle, which will be reconstructed beginning March 5.

Pedestrian traffic will be restricted in the area of Mentors' Circle, located in the space between Hullihen Hall, Morris Library and Memorial Hall. The sculpture itself is expected to be installed beginning March 26, and a ceremony celebrating the project will be scheduled in April.

The University commissioned the piece, "Wings of Thought," from acclaimed sculptor Richard Deutsch, who has fashioned it from a 27,000-pound block of white granite.

The 8-by-10-foot sculpture is an open book, carved on the left side with depictions reflecting Alison's intellectual interests and the "Heck Reaction" in honor of UD faculty member and Nobel Laureate Richard Heck. (For more about Heck and other UD connections to the Nobel Prizes, see the website.)

The right side of the book will be left blank to symbolize the future that will be written by today's and tomorrow's University students. Standing next to the book is a bronze quill pen, about 10 feet high.

In his proposal for "Wings of Thought," Deutsch said he was inspired by both UD's original seal, which depicts a book, and by the resemblance between an open book and the wings of a bird in flight. The quill, he said, not only was the writing implement used in Alison's

day but also continues the visual reference to a bird.

"When public art is carefully conceived and infused with meaning, it has the potential to build community and invite an intellectual and emotional response," Deutsch said in his proposal. "'Wings of Thought' will symbolically image the school's guiding philosophy and will celebrate the University's commitment to developing minds. The sculpture will define and create a new sense of place that conveys a sense of pride."

Mentors' Circle was created in 2001 to honor recipients of UD's Excellence in Teaching and Excellence in Advising awards with bricks bearing their names placed in the circle. With the reconstruction of the area and installation of the sculpture, those bricks will be replaced by new ones engraved with the names. In addition, granite pavers will be installed around the sculpture and will display the names of recipients of the Francis Alison Award, the University's highest faculty honor.

A selection committee representing the UD community reviewed proposals, provided input and ultimately chose "Wings of Thought" as the centerpiece of the project. Members of the Francis Alison Society, made up of the Alison Award recipients, played a key role in the selection process, said Debra Hess Norris, Henry Francis duPont Chair in Fine Arts and co-chair of the selection committee.

"Their guidance and support truly were instrumental in this process," Norris said. "We are very fortunate to have an artist of Richard Deutsch's prominence involved in this commission. We hope this is the start of many public art commissions across campus that will enliven our surroundings and inspire the community."

Janet Hethorn, professor and chair of the Department of Art and co-chair of the selection committee, said the committee was "inspired by Richard's creative vision" for the sculpture and Mentors' Circle. The project, she said, has "the potential to serve as a lasting iconic image that embodies the University of Delaware's longstanding commitment to engaged learning and excellence in scholarship."

University President Patrick Harker praised Deutsch's work and the way "Wings of Thought" celebrates UD's history and its commitment to academic excellence.

"It's fitting that the sculpture honors not only our founder, the Rev. Francis Alison, but also the faculty who have embodied the 'scholar-schoolmaster' ethos on which he built UD," Harker said. "I hope students, faculty, staff, alumni and visitors will draw inspiration from the piece, as they continue a lifetime of learning. Plans for the sculpture actually started years ago, with private donations and funds being raised and put aside to cover the project's cost."

About Mentors' Circle and the construction project

Plans call for work to begin on the project on Monday, March 5, when construction fencing will be installed around the area. Site-preparation work will be done, and a large concrete base to support the sculpture will be constructed over about 10 days in mid-March.

The granite "Wings of Thought" will be installed beginning about March 26, with Deutsch on campus to oversee the work, which is expected to take about five days. Bricks and pavers will then be installed surrounding the sculpture, and the project will be completed and the fence

removed around April 13.

Mentors' Circle was first dedicated during Homecoming Weekend 2001, and bricks were later installed with the names of all recipients of UD Excellence in Teaching and Excellence in Advising Awards since the program began in 1960.

To view the award recipients currently recognized in Mentors' Circle, whose names will be engraved on new bricks that will be reinstalled around the sculpture, see the lists of faculty recipients of the Excellence in Teaching Award and those honored with the Excellence in Advising Award.

The Mentors' Circle reconstruction will also add granite pavers honoring all recipients of the Francis Alison Award, who make up the Francis Alison Society. To view those names, see this list.

About the artist and the selection process

Richard Deutsch has 30 years of experience creating large-scale sculptures and environments for both interior and exterior public spaces in his native California, as well as in Washington, D.C., Arlington, Va., and Chevy Chase, Md. His designs have featured stone, water, bronze and stainless steel.

His work in Chevy Chase, "Against the Day," earned Deutsch the Building of America Award in 2007. That piece transformed two adjoining open spaces into an interactive, park-like environment through the creation of an accessible water sculpture.

Deutsch has received numerous awards, including fellowships from the American Academy in Rome and the National Endowment for the Arts. His work is in the permanent collection of San Francisco's M.H. de Young Museum, the Henry Art Gallery of the University of Washington in Seattle and the Smithsonian Institution.

The selection committee for the Mentors' Circle project consisted of Francis Alison scholars, other faculty members, students and University supporters. Working with public art consultant Jack Becker of Forecast Public Art, the committee reviewed proposals from 17 artists and selected three finalists, from which Deutsch was chosen.

Members of the selection committee, in addition to co-chairs Norris and Hethorn, were Virginia Bradley, professor of art; Tsu-Wei Chou, P.S. DuPont Chair of Engineering and Francis Alison faculty member; Wayne Craven, H.F. du Pont Winterthur Professor Emeritus of Art History and Francis Alison member; Nancy Cooch, sculptor and member, Architectural Review Committee; Carol Hoffecker, Richards Professor Emeritus of History and Francis Alison member; Amanda Norbutus, doctoral student in preservation studies; Molly Sullivan, student, Student Government Association board member; Monica Taylor, vice president, University Development and Alumni Relations; and Janis Tomlinson, director, University Museums.

Members of the technical committee were Jules Bruck, assistant professor of landscape design; David Meyer, associate professor of art and head of Sculpture Studio Area; and Bruno Pouliot, adjunct assistant professor of art conservation and objects conservator, Winterthur Museum.

Article by Ann Manser

Images courtesy of Richard Deutsch

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