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Artist Fred Wilson gives SCAD MOA fresh perspectives for deFINE ART on Feb. 23

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By [Linda Sickler](#)

Conceptual artist Fred Wilson not only has been exploring Savannah in recent months, he's been absorbing it. That's the way he creates his art — studying places, people, artifacts and documents.

“I take it in like a sponge,” Wilson says. “It gets squeezed out and becomes a work of art.”

Wilson and his work will be honored during the third edition of deFINE ART, the Savannah College of Art and Design's annual fine arts showcase, which runs Feb. 21-25 at SCAD campuses in Savannah, Atlanta, Hong Kong and Lacoste, France.

In Savannah, Wilson will present, “Life's Link: An Installation by Fred Wilson Inspired by the Collections of Walter O. Evans,” an artistic intervention at the Walter O. Evans Collection of African American Art at the SCAD Museum of Art. He will speak about the project and his other work Feb. 23 at Trustees Theater.

When Wilson begins organizing an installation, he looks at all the resources he might possibly use in its construction.

“That also means the city,” he says.

“It's by osmosis, in a certain way, a research project. It's kind of a meandering process where I research the things that interest me.

“I try to see as much of a place as I can,” he says. “Generally, I speak to as many people as possible about what I do and what they do and get a sense of the place they live in.”

With the raw materials, Wilson begins the process of putting the exhibition together. “Sometimes ideas come out fully formed,

sometimes they're just casual comments people make," he says.

"At the end, I cull all these ideas and see how these things gel into an installation project," Wilson says. "If I see something, I put it out there."

This is the first time Wilson has worked with the private collection of someone he has gotten to know during the research process. He and Evans worked together to select artifacts for the intervention.

"He's been generous," Wilson says. "He doesn't want to influence my decisions."

In the installation, Wilson uses artworks and source materials from several historical institutions in Savannah. The installation will incorporate bricks and personal historic documents about the roles of black Savannahians in the city's history.

"I do like people to experience the work rather than have me over explain it," Wilson says. "Otherwise, they have me in their heads rather than their own responses."

Wilson has been in Savannah several times to do research and work on the exhibition. "The next trip will be to make the final decisions. This trip is when the magic happens.

"When people who have seen the exhibition before see it again, they will see my perspective at this particular moment, how I'm reframing it in my own way," Wilson says. "I hope they'll understand this is just my point of view at this moment. These works will be seen with other works in other contexts in future exhibitions."

The form of the installation will keep changing until the final moment.

"I know once all the art and documents are in the rooms, there will be shifts in thinking," Wilson says.

"My process is unique to me having been a regular art student at one point, but having worked in museums most of my adult life in various capacities. I also ran a nonprofit gallery at one time, and I have developed this way of working."

An activist as well as an artist, Wilson has created some controversial exhibitions during his career, but says he doesn't do it purposely. "I'm not trying to revise, change or bring new ways of looking at things.

"I don't always know when something is going to be provocative. I'm deeply invested in the material and I'm not always aware.

"Conversations happen after it goes up," Wilson says. "I don't look for controversy — it's not my personality at all."

Even so, Wilson is aware his work has upset some people.

"Some in museums like things the way they are and have a certain way of making displays and a certain way of thinking of a collection," he says.

In art school, Wilson was interested in sculpture and photography. "I also have had an abiding interest in finding things and

arranging things. There are so many things in the world that are only halfway understood but have multiple stories to tell.”

Each project is an adventure.

“I’m really looking forward to see what this exhibition turns out to be,” Wilson says. “It’s been a great journey. Walter’s collection is really remarkable and surprising.”

IF YOU GO

What: “Life’s Link and Other Projects: A Talk by Fred Wilson”

When: 7 p.m. Feb. 23

Where: Trustees Theater, 216 E. Broughton St.

Cost: Free
and open
to the public

Info:
scad.edu

Rating: 5 (1 vote)

