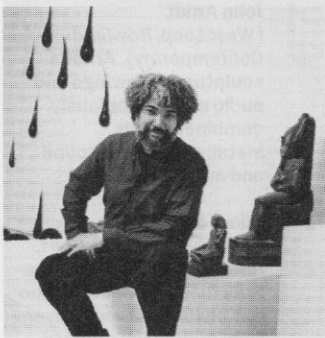


# Museum studies



## Fred Wilson re-presents history at Northwestern.

Conceptual artist Fred Wilson roots around the archives and storage rooms of museums and historical societies, culling and reassembling artifacts to create provocative installations that challenge how history is told and perceived. In 2003, he represented the United States in the Venice Biennale.

The New York-based artist visits Northwestern University this week to lecture at "Out of Sight," a gathering of art historians, museum curators, artists and the interested public. "The conference will explore the ways that visual representations of slavery and—often more important—the absence of these images influence our understanding and memory of slavery," says Northwestern art historian Huey Copeland who co-organized the event with colleague Krista Thompson.

It's a subject Wilson knows quite a bit about. He created his first project, "Mining the Museum," in 1992 at the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore, where his startling juxtapositions of objects included four elegant parlor chairs facing a slave whipping post and KKK headgear resting in an antique baby carriage. Wilson didn't set out to explore slavery specifically, but it was unavoidable. "Because a large part of that history is a slave history, it covered that topic quite thoroughly," said Wilson in a recent interview. Wilson will discuss his groundbreaking exhibition and some of his earlier work at the conference.

After his visit to Evanston, Wilson heads off to the Jamaica Institute in Kingston for his first project in the Caribbean. A quick look at the institute's website reveals a bounty of cultural artifacts as well as more than 130,000 plant specimens. So, we had to ask, how does he even begin? "Because I am not a traditional scholar and researcher—I am an artist—the whole process is a sort of meandering process," Wilson says. "I am fully aware that I am not going to see everything, and I am fully okay with that. I am always aware that I am not getting the full picture." That's in sync with the whole point of his work, although Wilson's quick to admit his process is no better than any other curatorial process: "If I did it on ten different days, I would see ten different things."

That said, he does try to have a strategy for accessing collections. "I start with a topic and see where it takes me," he says, "and remarkable things have happened." For example, when he was in Sweden working at an anthropology museum with a 200-year-old collection, he agreed to let a television crew follow him around. He wanted to be cooperative but regretted his decision, because his process of just looking around is a very private one. "I didn't know what I was going to find if anything," he says. Aware that a camera would be following his every move, Wilson did not want to construct something false. "So I decided to look at things I was totally uninterested in."

He began going through a rock collection, and spotted a rock with a date and name carved into it. "It turned out to be a rock carved from the Caribs, on the island that my family is from." Of all the thousands of rocks at the museum, Wilson had unearthed something profoundly personal.—RL

*"Out of Sight: New World Slavery and the Visual Imagination" runs Friday 2 and Saturday 3 at the Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art beginning at 9:30am. Wilson will speak Friday 2 at 4:30pm. For a complete schedule, call 847-491-7077 or see [www.wcas.northwestern.edu/arhistory/outofsight/](http://www.wcas.northwestern.edu/arhistory/outofsight/).*

## Thomas McCormick Gallery

835 W Washington Blvd at Peoria St (312-226-6800, [www.thomasmccormick.com](http://www.thomasmccormick.com)). Tue–Sat 10am–5:30pm.

"The Storm Departs." In the dude-rich world of the Abstract Expressionists, plenty of talented women artists were overlooked. **Perle Fine** (1908-1988) was one of them, even though Willem de Kooning invited her to join "The Club." This exhibition of Perle's work anticipates a retrospective of her work at Hofstra University in 2009. Opens Fri 2, 5–8:30pm. Through Apr 14.

## Packer Schopf Gallery

942 W Lake St between Morgan and Sangamon Sts (312-226-8984, [www.aronpacker.com](http://www.aronpacker.com)). Tue–Sat 11am–5:30pm.

"Not to Scale" Every now and then a landscape can look so perfect that it seems fake. Amsterdam photographer **Toni Hafkenschied** saw such a sight during a summer trip a few years ago and has been playing around with the idea of picture postcard loveliness ever since. Hafkenschied's landscapes are color tweaked and shot in soft focus or with shallow depth of