

SITUATING ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION RESEARCH AND EDUCATION WITHIN AN ARTS CONTEXT: CHARLOTTE'S CENTER FOR COMMUNITY, HERITAGE, AND THE ARTS (CHART)

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ABSTRACT:

The Center for Community, Heritage, and the Arts (CHART) at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte is focused on preservation and interpretation of the built environment through hands-on engagement with communities, their legacies, and specific places. CHART furthers the understanding of how the inherited constructed environment intersects with identities and cultural practices by situating architectural preservation conversations and preservation education within a broad interdisciplinary arts context.

CHART brings together faculty and students from across the university to provide experiences for graduate students in the Master of Science in Architecture - Critical Heritage Studies concentration to engage in interdisciplinary curriculum and research that engages in local solutions and global discourses, methods, and practices focused on tangible and intangible heritages. CHART and the MS in Architecture - Critical Heritage diversifies approaches and practices of interacting with the past and with places as well as promoting the stories and sites that foreground the heritage of communities underrepresented in heritage professions, practices, and conversations.

This poster shares examples of CHART's research, including projects in which the MS in Architecture - Critical Heritage students have been engaged. It will demonstrate applied practices, including Ring Shout dance traditions to incorporate traditional African practices into commemorating important African American sites; music and dance concerts based on oral histories and mappings of a diverse Charlotte neighborhood; a series of exhibitions and site markers focused on fostering community conversations about the legacy of lynching; and an original musical theatre production about textile mill and labor movement history performed on site at a historic mill.

Situating Architectural Preservation Research and Education within an Arts Context

We value traditionally appreciated local and global heritage as well as the heritage of previously underrepresented and misrepresented communities. We hope to empower those communities to participate in preserving the tangible and intangible legacies of the past.

We seek to attract and train a more diverse group of heritage professionals, remove barriers to heritage education, and build a curriculum that de-centers traditional preservation practices while privileging other voices and including communities in the conversation.

To support these goals, we at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte launched the intertwined Master of Science in Architecture - Critical Heritage Studies in and the Center for Community, Heritage, and the Arts (CHART) within the College of Arts + Architecture.

“A creative heritage approach encourages the integration of heritage and creative arts methodologies and theories to produce new knowledge that sits alongside histories, rather than standing in for them.”

– Lauren Istvandy, *Integrating Heritage and the Performing Arts* –

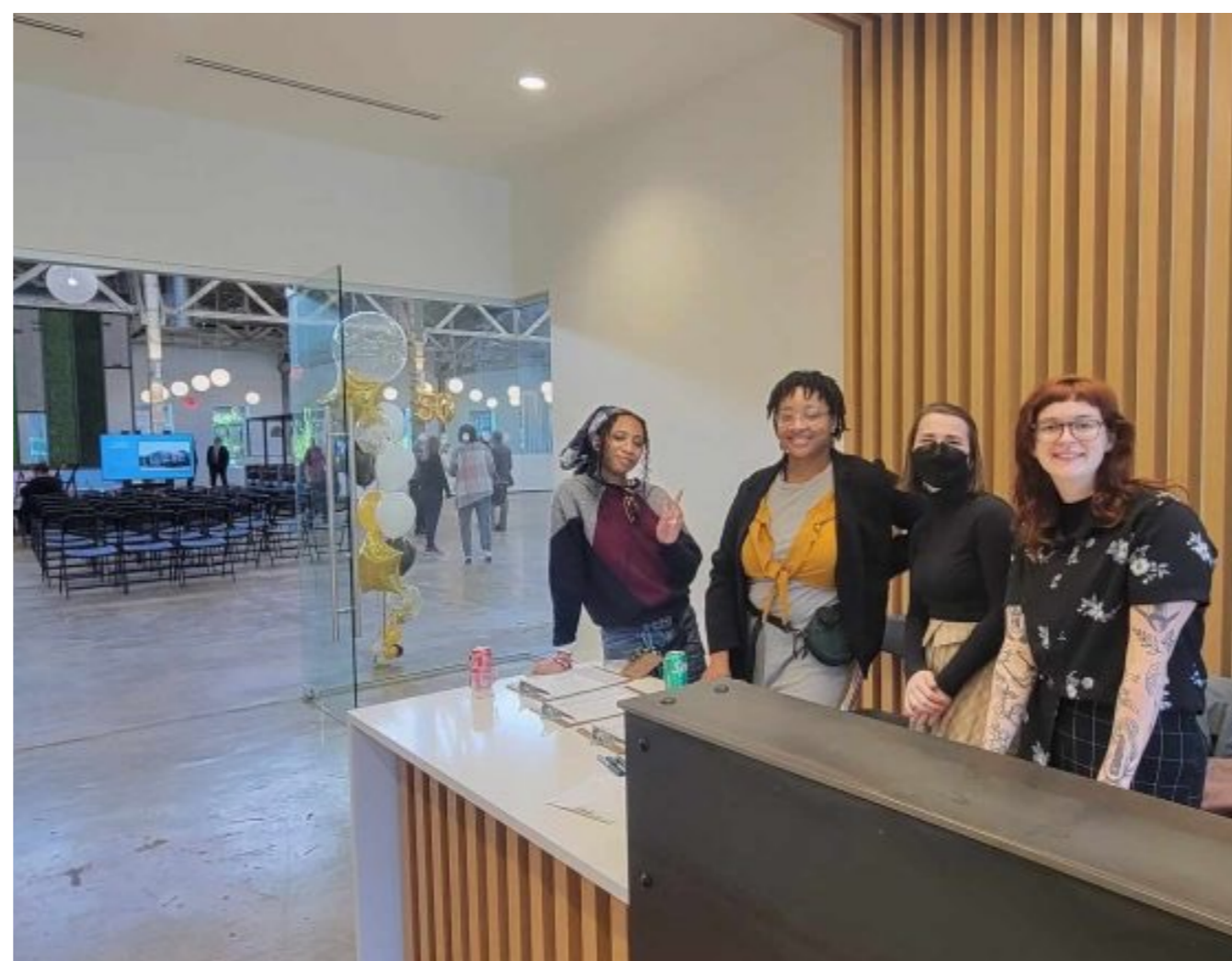


Fig. 1. MS in Architecture Critical Heritage Studies students volunteering at the Charlotte Mecklenburg Landmarks Commission 50th Anniversary Celebration. Photo by Emily Makas.

Center for Community, Heritage, and the Arts (CHART)

Mission

- To foreground interdisciplinary conversations focused on preservation and interpretation of the built environment and specific places through hands-on engagement with communities and through the visual and performing arts.
- To strengthen existing collaborations and build new research initiatives exploring the intersections between community, place-making, culture, heritage, and the arts – both globally and locally.

Priority Research Areas / Guiding Questions

- **Heritage Placemaking through the Arts:** How do intangible and tangible heritage practices intersect? How do the arts enhance the experience, memory, and preservation of historic sites and spaces? How do the arts revitalize and maintain community vitality through creative placemaking and tradition building? How does heritage inform new creative practices? How are communities engaged in the co-production of arts and heritage research and practice with artists and academics?
- **Elevating Community Stories:** How do the arts battle erasure of threatened communities and places? How do arts and heritage practices negotiate conflicting narratives and perspectives among varying communities? How do the arts engage collective memories of troubled history and sites of trauma? How can the arts investigate and serve as a vehicle for the heritage of diaspora and immigrant communities, particularly in the Charlotte metropolitan region? How do migrant and diasporic communities retain and engage identity and tradition as well as transform to new homes through arts practices?

Critical Heritage Studies MS in Architecture

Mission

To diversify the field of heritage professionals and the heritage preserved by providing training that situates historic preservation in a critical and transdisciplinary context, engages the global and local, diversifies approaches and practices, and promotes experiential learning, community engagement, and social and environmental sustainability.

Curriculum

- **Required Courses:** Critical Approaches to Heritage, Historic Preservation, Project-Based Research Lab, Heritage Internship, Capstone Colloquium
- **Electives:** Ethnographic Methods, Cultural Resource Management, Museum Studies, Oral History, Digital History, Arts Administration Foreign Study, Architectural History
- **Dual Degree Options:** with Architecture, Urban Design, Public History, or Anthropology

“Heritage is something vital and alive. It is a moment of action, not something frozen in material form. It incorporates a range of actions that often occur at places or in certain spaces. ... It is this tension between action and material representation that is an important element of heritage.”

– Laurajane Smith, *The Idea of Heritage* –

Current Integrated Research Projects



Fig. 2. Ring Shout Tradition at Historic Rosedale. Photo by Meg Whalen



Fig. 3. Entrance to Browne's Ferry Neighborhood. Photo by Emily Makas



Fig. 4. Exhibition at the Levine Museum of the New South. Photo by Emily Makas.



Fig. 5. Historic Postcard of the Loray Mill. Public Domain.

Rosedale Roots: Ring Shout Traditions and Legacy Curation

Tamara Williams (Dance) and Sequina DuBose (Music) performed African American Ring Shout at Historic Rosedale, a house museum in Charlotte. The tradition of dance and call and response originated in Africa and was practiced by the enslaved. The ceremony honored the ancestors who labored at the former plantation and was hosted by Rosedale's African American Legacy Project, which is documenting and sharing stories about the enslaved at Rosedale and their descendants. A Graduate Research Assistant from the Critical Heritage MS program collaborated on mapping family trees and presented at the Ring Shout event.

Browne's Ferry: Neighborhood History through the Arts

Meg Whalen (CoA+A), Nadia Anderson (Architecture), Mira Frisch (Music) and Ashley Tate (Dance) are exploring the history and heritage of the diverse Charlotte neighborhood of Browne's Ferry and the adjacent Grace AME Zion Church. New dance choreography and musical pieces are emerging from the research and being performed for the community in collaboration with a rap artist from the neighborhood. A Graduate Research Assistant from Architecture is assisting with collecting oral histories from neighborhood residents and parishioners as well as with mapping movement of families and communities to and from Browne's Ferry.

It Happened Here: Legacy of Lynching in Mecklenburg County

Emily Makas (Heritage) and Marc Manack (Architecture) are working with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Community Remembrance Project, an affiliate of the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama to document, mark, and foster community conversations around the two known victims of lynching in Charlotte and their contexts. The team, along with Adam Justice (CoA+A) researched, designed, and installed an exhibition at the Levine Museum of the new South. Currently, a Graduate Research Assistant from the Critical Heritage MS program is reimagining that exhibition to travel to public libraries.

Threads: The Loray Mill Strike Musical

Sequina DuBose (Music) and Laura Waringer (Theatre) have commissioned a new musical theatre work based on the 1929 labor strike at the Loray Mill in Gastonia, NC, which was led by Ella May Wiggins, a textile worker and balladeer. The musical will be performed on site by students at the historic mill, which has been adaptive reused as a thriving condominium. The performance will incorporate acrobatics by the cirque company led by Carlos Cruz (Theatre). Integrating architecture and critical heritage students and faculty into the preparation and setting of the space for the performance is a forthcoming project.