

WoodmereArtMuseum

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Building of the House of Wisdom

Violet Oakley Mural Series Slated as Ongoing Exhibition Due to Popular Demand

January 21, 2018 - Ongoing

PHILADELPHIA - Woodmere Art Museum presents *Violet Oakley: The Building of the House of Wisdom*, due to popular demand. Initially curated as part of Woodmere's Fall 2017 exhibition, *A Grand Vision: Violet Oakley and the American Renaissance*, the museum has dedicated its Schnader Gallery entirely to Oakley's mural series due to overwhelming public interest.



Image Credit: Darryl Moran Photography

Originally created in 1911 for the home of Charlton Yarnall at 17th and Locust Streets in Philadelphia, Violet Oakley (1874-1961) created the mural cycle, *The Building of the House of Wisdom*, which was inspired by and served as a metaphor for the Ages of Man and the Progress of Culture. Three semicircular lunettes represent the ages of man from childhood through youth and maturity. Six octagonal panels were set into the arches over the lunettes, and tell the stories of The Life of Hercules and American Invention. Four

pendentives, which connected the lunettes to the dome, show the advance of architecture through the ages. In total, thirteen murals and a stained glass dome eight and a half feet in diameter make up this series designed for the grand reception hall of the Yarnall mansion.

In 1962, the American Red Cross acquired the Yarnall property and began converting the building into office space. Concerned about the preservation of Oakley's work, Edith Emerson - Oakley's life partner and then Director of Woodmere Art Museum - acquired twelve of the murals for Woodmere's permanent collection. At the time, one of the pendentives, *The High Tower*, was unable to be removed, having begun to tear upon extraction. Over time it was reglued and painted over, seemingly lost for good.

In 2017, with permission from the Yarnall property's current owner the Honorable Allan Domb, Woodmere removed what remained of *The High Tower*. He stated, "I was happy to donate *The High*

Tower mural, the last in the collection created by Violet Oakley. I would like to thank Woodmere Art Museum for coordinating the removal and restoration of this mural.” The pendentive, having been covered with primer and house paint over the years, was hardly recognizable to the naked eye, and in need of great repair. Through the generosity of Valentine Walsh, in memory of her mother Patricia Stewart Walsh, conservator Stephen Erisoty was able to bring *The High Tower* back to life. Although the finished painting was lost, hours of painstaking conservation restored Oakley’s original brush strokes.

Today, visitors of Woodmere can not only see *The High Tower* as it existed in its earliest state, but experience the grandeur of *The Building of the House of Wisdom* once again as a full mural series.

Violet Oakley was an artist – painter, muralist, portraitist, stained-glass designer, and illustrator – of prolific accomplishments. At a time before women had the right to vote, she achieved international fame for her prestigious government commissions for the Pennsylvania State Capitol. She made extensive contributions to Philadelphia institutions and to the American Renaissance revival, and fashioned herself to be an artist-diplomat, promoting world peace as she created portraits of the delegates to the League of Nations and to the United Nations. She is an integral part of the history of Philadelphia artists and to the American Renaissance movement.

Violet Oakley: The Building of the House of Wisdom will be on view at Woodmere Art Museum as an ongoing exhibition highlighting Oakley’s prowess as an American Renaissance artist.

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About Woodmere Art Museum

Housed in a 19th-century stone mansion on six acres in the Chestnut Hill neighborhood of Philadelphia, [Woodmere Art Museum](http://www.woodmereartmuseum.org) offers a unique museum experience that centers on the art and artists of Philadelphia. The building, grounds, and core of the permanent collection are the gifts of Charles Knox Smith (1845 – 1916). Born of modest means, Smith became a passionate collector of contemporary art in his day. In 1898 he purchased the Woodmere estate with the grand ambition of creating a spiritual experience through encounters with great works of art in the context of the green beauty of the Wissahickon and Chestnut Hill. Woodmere continues to honor and interpret Smith’s vision of bringing art and nature together with a collection that highlights historical and contemporary art as well as outdoor sculpture. Woodmere’s vibrant, changing exhibitions serve as a platform for an ongoing series of opportunities: family events, tours, gallery talks, lectures, panel discussions, studio art classes, film, and music performances. Woodmere is accredited by the American Association of Museums, a distinction held by only approximately five percent of museums nationwide.

The Museum is open to the public Tuesday – Sunday 10 a.m. – 5 p.m., Friday 10 a.m. – 8:45 p.m.. Admission is \$10; FREE on Sunday. For more information: [woodmereartmuseum.org](http://www.woodmereartmuseum.org).