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Mothers of Milwaukee Modernism: Building the Layton School of Art

Docomomo Wisconsin's From the Archives Lecture Celebrates Charlotte Partridge and Miriam Frink's Radical Legacy

MILWAUKEE, WI – Docomomo Wisconsin, in partnership with AIA Wisconsin, the Milwaukee Public Library, the Wisconsin Architectural Archive, UWM Special Collections, and Frederick Avenue Gallery, proudly presents **Mothers of Milwaukee Modernism: Building the Layton School of Art**, a lecture and pop-up exhibition exploring the visionary work of Charlotte Partridge and Miriam Frink. The event will take place on **Tuesday, April 22**, at the **Milwaukee Public Library Central Branch**, Frank P. Zeidler Humanities Room.

Schedule

4:30 PM – Check-in and pop-up exhibition opens

5 00 PM – Lecture begins

6:30 PM – Post-event social at Stella's Cocktail Dive

Location

Milwaukee Public Library – Central Branch

814 West Wisconsin Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53233

Tickets and Registration

This event is free and open to the public, but space is limited.

Please register in advance through Eventbrite:

[Mothers of Milwaukee Modernism: Building the Layton School of Art Lecture](#)

About the Lecture

Charlotte Partridge and Miriam Frink—pioneering educators, designers, and life partners—transformed Milwaukee's cultural landscape through their leadership of the Layton School of Art. Founded in 1921, the school emerged independently yet in parallel to the Bauhaus, championing a radical new model of interdisciplinary arts education that integrated creative practice with design, industry, and civic life.

In 1951, they moved Layton into a striking glass-block and poured-concrete structure on Prospect Avenue overlooking Lake Michigan. This relocation represented a shift in Milwaukee's identity—from an industrial river city to a lakefront capital of modernist culture. Layton trained a generation of influential artists, designers, and architects, including **Lillian Leenhouts**, Wisconsin's first licensed woman architect.

Partridge's influence extended far beyond the school. She collaborated with Zonta International to develop **Zonta Manor**, an innovative housing project designed by Leenhouts for professional women. She also shaped the Milwaukee War Memorial alongside Ella Brandt and led Wisconsin's Federal Art Project during the Great Depression, embedding art into public infrastructure across the state.

Their queerness—unspoken but foundational—was embedded in their leadership, vision, and radical inclusivity. Today, their legacy lives on through the **Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design (MIAD)**, Layton's official successor. According to MIAD's 2024 Campus Climate Survey, over 70% of students identify as LGBTQ+, reflecting the cultural impact of the experimental, welcoming community Partridge and Frink fostered nearly a century ago.

Featured Speaker

Seth Ter Haar (he/him) is an artist, curator, and Docomomo Wisconsin Fellow whose research focuses on queer histories in art and architecture. A 2023 MIAD graduate, he curated *Predecessor: Works from the Layton School of Art*, and is founder of Frederick Avenue Gallery, a collective dedicated to preserving queer cultural narratives in Milwaukee. Ter Haar is a 2023 recipient of the Gener8tor Art x Sherman Phoenix Accelerator grant, an Honorable Mention from the International Sculpture Center, and a 2025 Mary Nohl Fellowship finalist.

This lecture will explore:

- Layton's parallel evolution alongside the Bauhaus
 - The architectural and urban impact of its lakefront campus
 - Queerness as a catalyst for cultural innovation
 - The legacy of Layton's radical pedagogy in MIAD's present
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Collaborating Organizations:

Wisconsin Architectural Archive | Milwaukee Public Library | Docomomo Wisconsin | AIA Wisconsin | UWM Libraries | Frederick Avenue Gallery

Images Available Upon Request

For media inquiries, interviews, or additional information, please contact:

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