

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Rhode Island School of Design and National Park Service Partner on Cultural Study and Object Creation from Fallen Witness Tree

RISD Student Work to Be Displayed at the Hampton National Historic Site,
March 25– May 25, 2010

contact: Danielle Mancuso, 401.454.6334 or dmancuso@risd.edu

Providence, RI –The Rhode Island School of Design [RISD] and the National Park Service [NPS] recently partnered on a Witness Tree Project, allowing students to create objects from a fallen pecan tree at Hampton National Historic Site in Towson, MD. “Witness Trees,” as designated by the NPS, are long-standing trees that have witnessed key events in history. RISD’s collaboration with the NPS marks the first time that wood from a fallen Witness Tree has been used as a teaching tool. The project enables the learning of history through material culture, whereby the objects created are inspired by the rich cultural history “seen” by the tree.

In a joint furniture studio and history seminar, taught by Dale Broholm, Senior Critic of Furniture Design, and Daniel Cavicchi, Associate Professor of History, Philosophy, and Social Sciences, student designers from the disciplines of furniture, industrial design, architecture, ceramics and textiles researched Hampton’s significance in American history to build a fully informed design vocabulary from which they created objects. In conjunction with their research, students visited the tree’s site in Maryland.

“During a visit to Gettysburg National Military Park, I was made aware of Witness Trees. After inquiring about the possibility of using the historic material, I immediately saw the potential for an educational collaboration between RISD and the National Park Service,” Broholm notes. “Working with the tree from Hampton shows how history informs objects and provides a deeper understanding of culture. This has been an enriching experience and our hope is this project will enrich the learning of others as well.”

The pecan Witness Tree studied by RISD student’s dates back to the mid-19th century and was planted under the direction of Eliza Ridgely, the third of six generations of Ridgelys to live at Hampton. In 1790, when Hampton Mansion was completed, it was possibly the largest house in the United States. The Hampton estate then included agricultural lands, mills, quarries, and an ironworks, serving for over half a century as a center of industry and slave labor in the upper South. Students created objects ranging from dolls and corsets to writing desks and slave stools, representing many aspects of plantation life including labor, slavery, horticulture, and leisure that took place for over seven generations at the Hampton estate.

“This project brings to life the social, cultural and economic history of the Hampton property,” states Gregory Weidman, Curator of Hampton National Historic Site. “Watching the process of RISD students creating objects in response to the pecan Witness Tree was fascinating and a wonderful learning experience. Students got involved with history in a hands-on way, and the potential for discovery and learning at other NPS sites is endless.”

Student work will be on view in a special exhibition space at Hampton mansion at the Hampton National Historic Site. Approximately 20 student pieces will be featured, including works by every member of the class

Hampton National Historic Site

Winter Hours: Thursday – Monday 9:00 am – 5:00 pm

Tours: On the hour 10:00 am – 4:00 pm (no tour at noon)

For further information on tours, please call 410-823-1309 ext. 207 or visit

<http://www.nps.gov/hamp/index.htm>

About Rhode Island School of Design

Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) has earned a worldwide reputation as the preeminent college of art and design in the United States. Today, with more than 26,000 alumni, RISD enrolls nearly 2,000 undergraduates and 400 graduate students from the U.S. and almost 50 countries, offering degree programs in the fine arts, architecture, design disciplines and art education. Academic programs include research and design initiatives, the exploration of art criticism and contemporary cultural concerns, as well as international exchange programs. Each year hundreds of prominent artists, designers, critics and cultural leaders visit RISD's Providence campus. Among its many prized resources is The RISD Museum of Art, which houses a world-class collection of art objects from Ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome, and art of all periods from Asia, Europe and the Americas, as well as the latest in contemporary art. For more information, visit www.risd.edu or our.risd.edu.

High-res digital images are available by contacting Danielle Mancuso, dmancuso@risd.edu or 401.454.6334

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