

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

DRAFT

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Palm Springs Desert Museum

Other names/site number: Palm Springs Art Museum

Name of related multiple property listing:
The Architecture of E. Stewart Williams

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 101 Museum Drive

City or town: Palm Springs State: CA County: Riverside

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national statewide local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A B C D

<p>_____ Signature of certifying official/Title:</p>	<p>_____ Date</p>
<p>_____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	

<p>In my opinion, the property <u>meets</u> <u>does not meet</u> the National Register criteria.</p>	
<p>_____ Signature of commenting official:</p>	<p>_____ Date</p>
<p>_____ Title : State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	

Palm Springs Desert Museum
Name of Property

Riverside, California
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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/Museum

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/Museum

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: METAL:steel, CONCRETE, GLASS, STONE

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Palm Springs Desert Museum is situated at the foot of Mt. San Jacinto just west of Palm Canyon Drive in downtown Palm Springs. This important cultural institution was completed in 1976 with a major expansion occurring in 1996. Its design emerged from New Brutalist ideas that Williams had refined a few years earlier at Crafton Hills Community College. Raised above ground level, the museum building houses art galleries, natural history exhibits, and a performing arts center. A tranquil sunken garden imparts a sense of visual lightness to the overall composition. The building's design embraces the New Brutalism in its massive scale and reinforced concrete construction. Williams clad the building in a natural material—volcanic cinder—to reflect the rugged textures and colors of the mountain while producing dramatic textural effects that distinguish the museum's presence. The noncontributing resource is the freestanding Williams-designed Marks Administration Building completed in 1981 and located north of the museum. The Williams-designed second story museum addition completed in 1996 is not visible when viewed from Museum Drive because it rises from the rear half of the original building. The addition features a smooth surface with an incised grid pattern that differentiates it from the original concrete surfaces of hammered or ribbed aggregate and volcanic cinder cladding. The Palm Springs Desert Museum possesses sufficient historic and architectural integrity necessary to convey its significance.

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Narrative Description

The program for the Palm Springs Desert Museum called for 75,000 square feet of space. Due to a two-story height limit in Palm Springs at the time, a subterranean level was necessary to accommodate the large performing arts space and sculpture gardens that the program required. The art gallery and the natural history museum were raised above street level and housed in cubic volumes set at 90 degrees to the street. A staircase from the main floor leads to the lower level where the 433-seat theater was located as well as storage, workshops, and other spaces. The lower level also leads to the landscaped sculpture gardens. The original building permit dated 1973 reveals a cost of \$3,870,000 for the project.

The building is a New Brutalist design featuring reinforced concrete construction with a structural system of post-tensioned high-strength steel cables running the length of the cantilevered floor and roof beams. This system supports the high-ceilinged, column-free 60-foot span in the galleries, 80-foot span in the theater, and 100-foot span in the orientation center. The concrete is mixed with Warmtone cement and several aggregates with long expanses hammered to expose the aggregate.

In adapting New Brutalism to his architectural philosophy, Williams clad the building in a natural material with colors sympathetic to the adjacent mountainside. Following an extensive search, Williams discovered a lightweight volcanic cinder in Clearlake, Inyo County, California that was one-fourth the weight of regular stone for cladding the exterior. The dramatic textural effects of this material were sympathetic to the characteristics of the terrain, yet strengthened and distinguished the museum's presence. Williams then lifted the building above ground level and cantilevered the triangular galleries over the broad sunken garden in order to lighten the mass of the megastructure.

In 1981, in order to display the museum's Western Art Collection, the facility's administrative functions were relocated to a new, separate building just north of the original building. Named the Marks Administration Building, it was also designed by Williams. In 1993, Williams came out of retirement to design a 15,000 square foot second story addition to the original building. Having anticipated just such an expansion, Williams had cleverly designed the original building to support the weight of an additional floor. The new space would house galleries, a lecture hall, and art storage. Work was completed in 1996; however, building permits for this work were not located by the city. As if designed from the beginning, the expansion and modifications appear seamless, allowing site-lines to connect the divergent sections and opening up the interior.

Because the rear addition is not visible from the street and is differentiated from the original building, the integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, setting, feeling, and association of the museum remains high. As a result, the Palm Springs Desert Museum is able to convey its architectural significance because it exhibits key character defining features associated with the latter design work of E. Stewart Williams that began with Crafton Hills Community College in 1968.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1976

Significant Dates

1976

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Williams, E. Stewart

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Palm Springs Desert Museum is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C at the local level of significance in the area of Architecture. The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of E. Stewart Williams' post-1965 architectural approach to cultural institutions for the environment of the Coachella Valley. In addition, the property meets *The Architecture of E. Stewart Williams* Multiple Property Submission registration requirements for cultural institutions in association with the historic context "Architecture as environmental expression in the greater Coachella Valley, 1946-1976." The period of significance corresponds with the building's original date of construction, 1976. Because of its architectural distinction and monumental presence as the city's premier cultural institution, the Palm Springs Desert Museum possesses exceptional importance sufficient to meet Criteria Consideration G: Properties That Have Achieved Significance Within the Past Fifty Years.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The firm of Williams, Clark and Williams was commissioned by the Palm Springs Desert Museum to design a new 75,000 square foot facility to house art galleries, a natural history museum, and a performing arts center in 1973. E. Stewart Williams served as lead designer and Roger Williams as architectural engineer. The building opened to the public in 1976. A second story addition toward the rear of the building that was designed by Stewart Williams was completed in 1996.

The Palm Springs Desert Museum was designed in the latter part of Williams' career when he was adapting New Brutalist concepts to educational and cultural institutions. The building exemplifies the distinctive characteristics of his approach to concrete megastructures through the expression of humanizing values conveyed through scale and natural materials. In addressing scale, he imparted a sense of visual lightness to the overall composition by cantilevering the triangular galleries over a broad sunken garden bordering the street. Then, he deftly incorporated natural materials—in this case volcanic cinder as exterior cladding—that integrate with the local environment of Palm Springs. Form, material, color, scale—the themes that he had been observing and mastering since his earliest studies in architecture—unite in this building.

In 1978, the Palm Springs Desert Museum was given a Special Award of Excellence from the Inland California Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. Commented Williams of the museum when interviewed in 1986, "It certainly has become the center of Palm Springs cultural and social life. We're very proud of it. ... I think that's going to be the thing that maybe the Williams brothers are remembered for the longest in Palm Springs. It's certainly been our joy to do it and I think it will be there for a long long time after we're gone."¹

¹ E. Stewart Williams as videotaped in the Palm Springs Public Library's local history project "Prickly Pears," a series of videotaped interviews.

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Because of its architectural distinction and monumental presence as the city's premier cultural institution, the Palm Springs Desert Museum possesses exceptional importance sufficient to meet Criteria Consideration G. The importance of the building and its significance within the oeuvre of E. Stewart Williams are discussed within the historic context presented in the Multiple Property Documentation Form, "Architecture as environmental expression in the greater Coachella Valley, 1946-1976." The building is a key example of the cultural institution property type that maintains sufficient integrity to be readily identifiable as the work of master architect E. Stewart Williams. As a result, the property meets National Register Criterion C because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of architecture designed for cultural institutions by master architect E. Stewart Williams in the latter part of his career.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

As indicated in *The Architecture of E. Stewart Williams* Multiple Property Documentation Form.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University of California, Santa Barbara
- Other

Name of repository: Palm Springs Art Museum, Architecture and Design Center

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 4.63 acres

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 33.824297 Longitude: -116.550014

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Property is located at 101 N Museum Drive, Palm Springs, Riverside County, California between N Belardo Road and W Tahquitz Canyon Way. The property fronts the entirety (700 feet) of N Museum Drive. Its legal description is 4.63 ACRES M/L IN POR PAR 1 PM 001/017. APN 513-110-034

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Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

Property includes the entire parcel historically associated with the Palm Springs Desert Museum.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Peter Moruzzi/Architectural Historian
organization: _____
street & number: 2018 Griffith Park Blvd., #114
city or town: Los Angeles state: CA zip code: 90039
e-mail petermoruzzi@gmail.com
telephone: (213) 706-0151
date: January 2016

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Palm Springs Desert Museum
City or Vicinity: Palm Springs
County: Riverside
State: CA
Photographer: Peter Moruzzi
Date Photographed: January 2016

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Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 13 East elevation, camera facing southwest
- 2 of 13 East elevation, camera facing west
- 3 of 13 South elevation, camera facing north
- 4 of 13 Southeast elevation, camera facing northwest
- 5 of 13 North elevation, camera facing south
- 6 of 13 Sunken courtyard (north), camera facing south
- 7 of 13 Sunken courtyard (north), camera facing southwest
- 8 of 13 Main lobby, camera facing west
- 9 of 13 Addition, interior, camera facing northeast
- 10 of 13 Addition, interior, camera facing south
- 11 of 13 Interior staircase, camera facing west
- 12 of 13 Auditorium, camera facing northeast
- 13 of 13 Marks Administration Building, south and east elevations, camera facing northwest

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- Figure 2 East elevation, looking southwest
- Figure 3 East elevation, looking west, 1976
- Figure 4 Southeast elevation, looking northwest
- Figure 5 Sunken sculpture garden (south), looking north
- Figure 6 Sunken sculpture garden (south), looking west

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- Figure 7 Interior staircase, looking east, 1976
- Figure 8 Interior gallery (south), looking southeast, 1976
- Figure 9 Auditorium, looking southeast, 1976

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

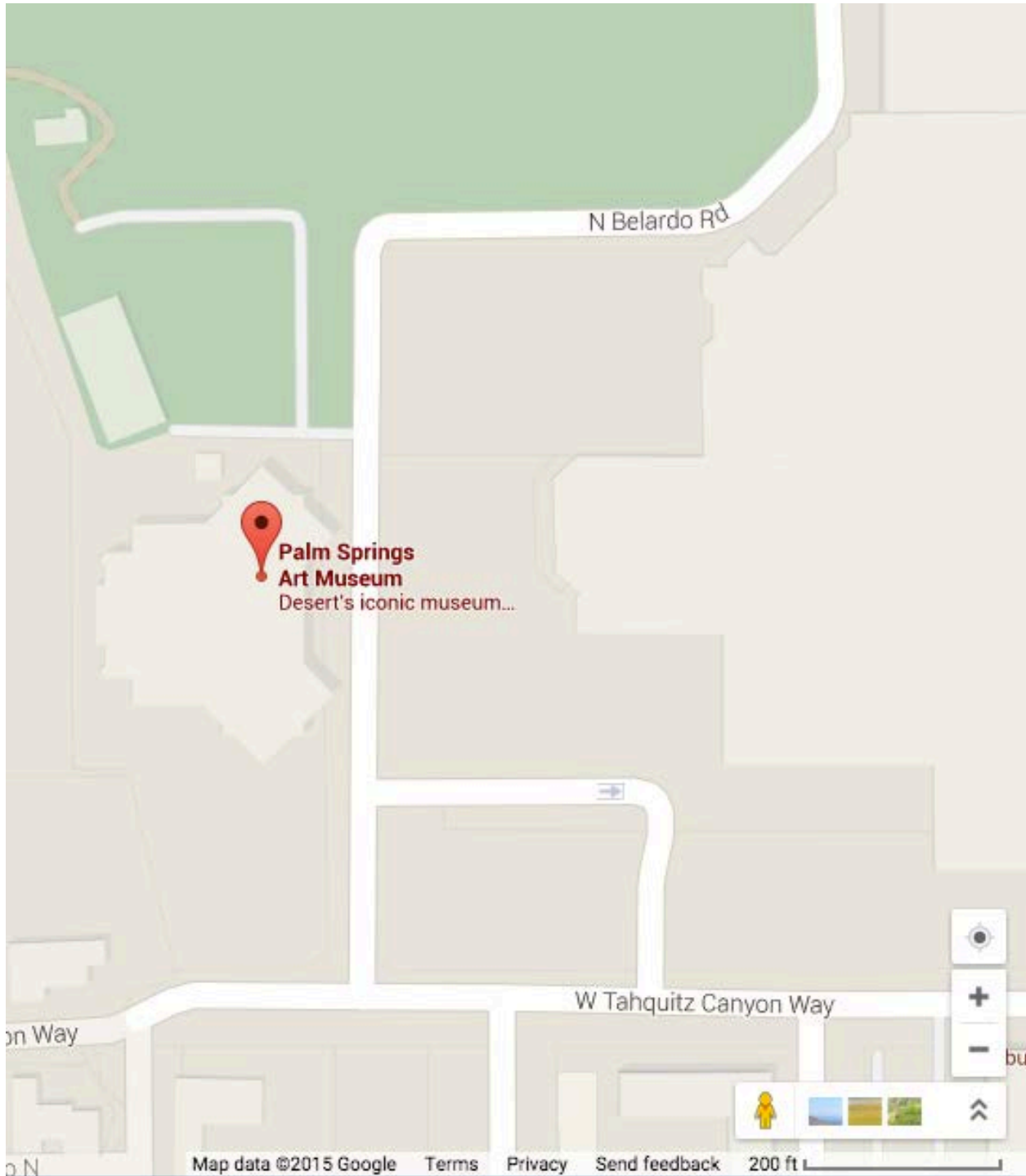
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Location Map

Latitude: 33.824297

Longitude: -116.550014



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Sketch Map/Photo Key



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Figure 1. East elevation, looking southwest, 1976



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Figure 2. East elevation, looking southwest, 1976



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Figure 3. East elevation, looking west, 1976



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Figure 4. Southeast elevation, looking northwest, 1976



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Figure 5. Sunken sculpture garden (south), looking north, 1976



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Figure 6. Sunken sculpture garden (south), looking west, 1976



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Figure 7. Interior staircase, looking east, 1976



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Figure 8. Interior gallery (south), looking southeast, 1976



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Figure 9. Auditorium, looking southeast, 1976



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