

**Houses without Borders:  
STEAM program inspired by the works of  
Friedensreich Hundertwasser and Oliver Nestus Freeman**

**Brick Scholars and the Imagination Station  
Science and History Museum, Wilson, North Carolina  
May 11, 2019**



## ABSTRACT

Brick Scholars and the Imagination Station presented a free STEAM program, *Houses without Borders*, to create houses with legos and found objects. The buildings of Oliver Nestus Freeman of Wilson, North Carolina and Friedensreich Hundertwasser were the inspiration for building houses out of the ordinary, which used no straight lines and blurred the borders between inside and outside. More than 75 people—primarily parents with their children—took part in the program which was part of an all-day arts event in Wilson, North Carolina called “Outside In.” *Houses without Borders* meets the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: #4 Quality Education, #11 Sustainable Cities and Communities, and #17 Partnerships for the Goals.

The program was sponsored by GiGEast, and was in cooperation with the Arts Council of Wilson County, the Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park, and supported by ACD--Agency for Cultural Diplomacy and the Hundertwasser Private Foundation.

## **Program Description**

*Houses without Borders* was a STEAM program created to complement a planned Outsider Art/Folk day-long celebration on May 11, 2019 in Wilson, North Carolina, called “Outside In.”

The day began with an Arts Council of Wilson event at the Saturday Farmers and Artisans Market at the Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park. The event was in conjunction with The Scrap Exchange: A Creative Reuse Art Center (of Durham, NC); during the morning, children could make art and objects out of found materials brought to the park by The Scrap Exchange.

Following this event, the Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park had the Paperhand Puppets from Durham, NC give a program at the Edna Boykin Theatre on Nash Street in Wilson. The puppets then marched down the street two blocks to the Imagination Station to lead everyone to the

*Houses without Borders* program. [Link to video footage of parade.](#)

[https://www.instagram.com/p/BxVWXwwASmC/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_button\\_share\\_sheet](https://www.instagram.com/p/BxVWXwwASmC/?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet)

*Houses without Borders* was inspired by the work of Wilson, NC builder/artist, Oliver Nestus Freeman. Freeman (1882-1955) was a prolific, creative, and multi-talented craftsman active in Wilson from about 1910 to his death in 1955. He became the community’s preeminent brick and stonemason and also worked in tile and concrete. Freeman identified himself as a brick mason, but he was skilled at all types of masonry work. He also created imaginative masonry sculptures that enhance many Wilson gardens. Over the years he added stone and concrete garden sculptures to his property, including a 7-foot dinosaur. He would travel to Manteo, NC on the Outer Banks to collect shells that he would embed in his walls, interior fireplace surrounds, and

sculptures. He also constructed a rental dwelling, to help with the local housing shortage.

Known as the Freeman Round House (1940s), the house of rough stone features a circular plan divided into wedge-shaped rooms. Long a landmark of the community, the round house is now a museum. (from Kate Ohno, 2009; <https://ncarchitects.lib.ncsu.edu/people/P000382>). Freeman embodied creative thinking and design, refusing to follow standard norms, and worked to create his own designs. He worked with no borders.

Similarly, Friedensreich Hundertwasser (1928-2000) worked outside of the traditional methods of design and construction. He was born Friedrich Stowasser in Vienna, Austria.

Hundertwasser's artistic vision expressed itself mainly in pictorial art, environmentalism, design and architecture. The common themes in his work utilized bright colors, organic forms, a reconciliation of humans with nature, and a strong individualism. Hundertwasser was a visionary artist who promoted a life that is in harmony with the nature through his art and life. He furthered his aims and credos by issuing manifestos. From the early 1950s he increasingly focused on architecture, advocating more just human and environmental friendly buildings. This began with manifestos, essays and demonstrations. For example, he read out his "Mouldiness Manifesto against Rationalism in Architecture" in 1958 on the occasion of an art and architectural event held at the Seckau Monastery.

Inspired by Hundertwasser's ecological thought in art and architecture, participants of the *Houses without Borders* workshops have created a manifesto. Participants wrote their manifesto on a sticky note and placed it on the wall of the courtroom where the workshop was held. In the video, you can see a young child coloring his manifesto (2:00 - 2:02 with green marker). YouTube video:

<https://youtu.be/FZJgFwsKJH8>

The program was held on the second floor of the museum, in the original courtroom where participants entered the experiential exhibit and workshop, *Houses without Borders*. Museum staff and Brick Scholars staff briefed attendees to go through the exhibit at their own pace. After explaining the workshop task and directions, participants were instructed to select a tray of materials. There were three choices:

1. Clay and natural objects (sea glass and sea shells)
2. Clay and colorful craft materials (beads, popsicle sticks, pipe cleaners)
3. LEGO bricks

Participants were given a summary prompt to help them frame the work of Hundertwasser

Create a community and or structure that expresses individuality, brings nature in; but does not disturb and/or harm the natural environment in which it is contained.

Remember -- "You are a guest of nature - behave." HW

and invited to read the exhibit boards placed throughout the courtroom, including side by side bios of Hundertwasser and Freeman. A slideshow of Hundertwasser's and Freeman's architecture played on a digital slideshow projected above the judge's bench to familiarize their architecture and art with the audience.

Once participants completed their builds, they placed them in the community in the jury box (if they created with legos). Participants were able to take home their clay and found material builds.

Workshop participants had the opportunity to take a photo with their builds and share out on social media using hashtags, which included #outsidein #imagination #SDG4 #SDG11 #SDG17 #globalgoals #houseswithoutborders.

Workshop participants finished the experiential workshop by reading an excerpt from Hundertwasser's manifesto on *Window Rights*, which were handwritten in cursive:

A person in a rented apartment must be able to lean out of his window and scrape off the masonry within arm's reach. And he must be allowed to take a long brush and paint everything outside within arm's reach.

To finalize the workshop, participants were invited to write their own manifesto and place on the Manifesto Wall in the courtroom.

### **Program Participants**

Approximately seventy-five people participated in *Houses without Borders*. The participants ranged in age from toddler through senior citizens, and all created objects, mostly houses, from found materials and in ways that did not follow standard norms. They were representative of the community, with people of different genders, races and ethnic groups.

### **Outcomes: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals**

*Houses without Borders* met United Nations SDG #4, Quality Education through teaching the participants about creativity, breaking boundaries, and about the work of two twentieth-century

artists/builders/architects that defied societal norms to build structures like no others. By building the program around Freeman and Hundertwasser, the students also gained knowledge regarding Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG #11); both artists used natural materials in their work in an effort to ground their objects locally, a key element of sustainable cities and communities. The program was also a partnership between government (GigEast), non-profit (Imagination Station), and private (Brick Scholars) entities, fulfilling SDG#17.

Photos and [video](#) illustrations below: YouTube video with highlights of workshop”

<https://youtu.be/FZJgFwsKJH8>

**Project Team:**

Megan Oteri, Brick Scholars CEO & United States *Let’s Brick!--Platform* Ambassador for the ACD-Agency for Cultural Diplomacy

Tatjana Christelbauer, Executive Director, ACD-Agency for Cultural Diplomacy

Nancy Van Dolsen, Executive Director, Imagination Station Science and History Museum

Brooke Bissette, Director of Exhibits and Facilities, Imagination Station Science and History Museum

A special thank you (Vielen Dank!) to the Hundertwasser Private Foundation for their permission to use the images of Hundertwasser’s work.

## Illustrations:

Room prior to beginning of *Houses without Borders*

[Video highlights of workshop -- Houses without Borders: https://youtu.be/FZJgFwsKJH8](https://youtu.be/FZJgFwsKJH8)



Construction materials





At work (and play)





**“You are a guest of  
nature - behave.”**

**— Friedensreich Hundertwasser**



Finished Work







Entrance to exhibit



Choice of materials to construct *Houses without Borders*

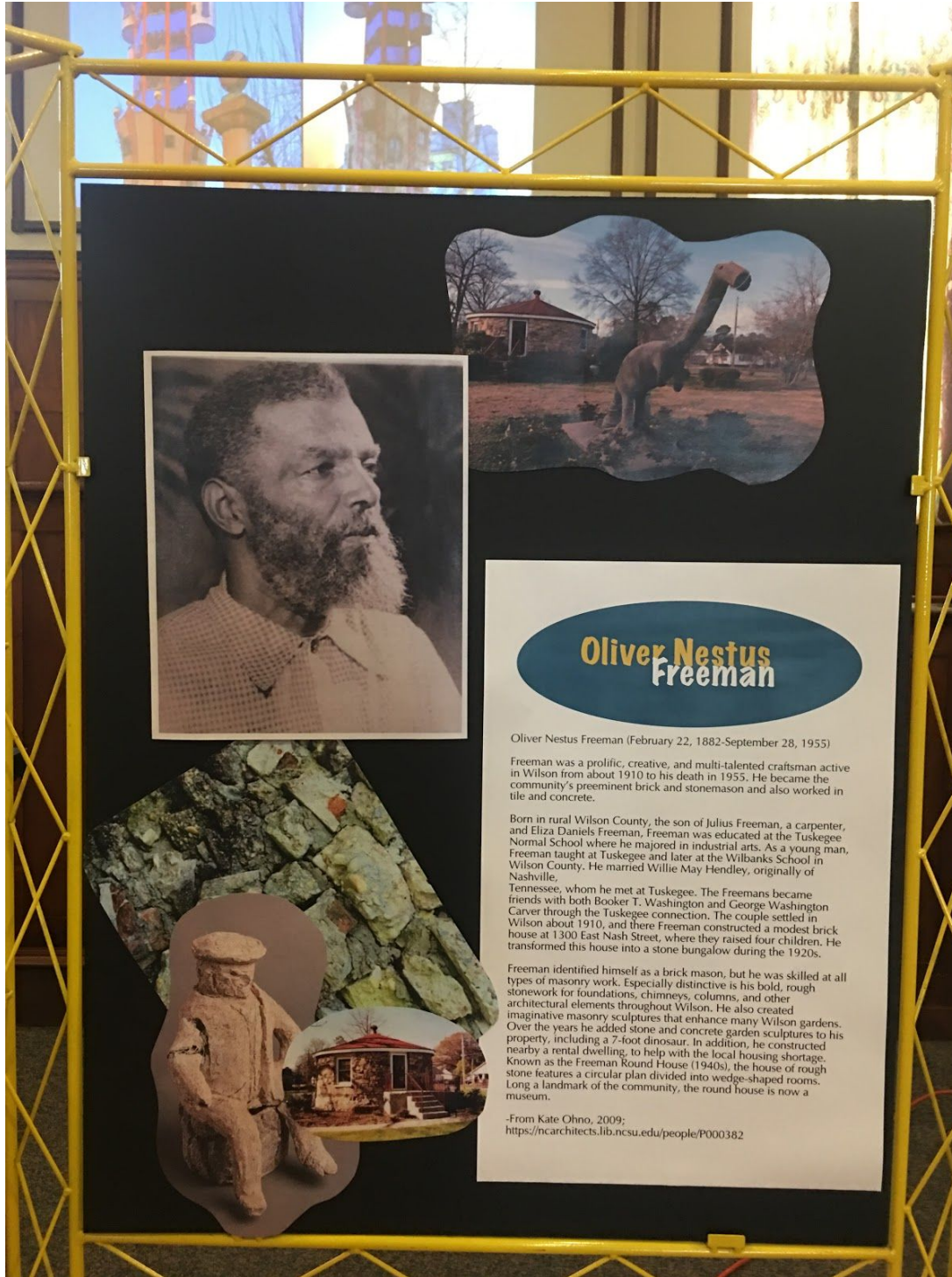


Oliver Nestus Freeman and Friedensreich Hundertwasser - side by side



"You are a guest of nature - behave." -- Friedensreich Hundertwasser





Oliver Nestus Freeman

# Friedrich Hundertwasser

Friedensreich Hundertwasser (December 15, 1928-February 19, 2000)

Born Friedrich Stowasser in Vienna, Austria, he began using the name Hundertwasser in the late 1940s. He was an artist and in the early 1950s, he also entered the field of architecture. In the 1970s, Hundertwasser moved to New Zealand, and worked from his home there. Hundertwasser also created works in the field of applied art, designing flags, stamps, coins, and posters. His buildings can be found in Austria, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Switzerland, and the United States.

Hundertwasser rejected traditional twentieth-century designs, and promoted the use of organic forms, bright colors, and no two windows or elements alike. He was fascinated by spirals, and called straight lines "godless and immoral" and "something cowardly drawn with a rule, without thought or feeling." He called his theory of art "transautomatism," focusing on the experience of the viewer rather than the artist.

A committed environmentalist, Hundertwasser believed that a humane environment was one that was close to nature. He often used green living roofs on his buildings, and often had grass and trees growing inside his structures.

Hundertwasser furthered his aims by issuing manifestos, such as the his decree about windows, which is posted on the rear wall of the courtroom.



**"...Hundertwasser's thoughts are a philosophy of the aesthetic, the life and art in harmony with nature."**

He wrote many texts about his thoughts and shared them with his community. One of his many manifestos is regarding window rights:

*"Some people say houses consist of walls.  
I say houses consist of windows..."*

*A person in a rented apartment must be able to lean out  
of his window and scrape off the masonry within arm's reach.  
And he must be allowed to take a long brush and paint  
everything outside within arm's reach."*

*-HW*

## Manifesto Wall





Megan Oteri, Founder and CEO of Brick Scholars, is the United States *Let's Brick--Platform* Ambassador for the ACD-Agency for Cultural Diplomacy in Vienna, Austria.



## *ArtImpact 2030* *Connect&Act*

*ACD-Agency for Cultural Diplomacy*  
[www.acdvienna.org/artImpact2030-manifesto](http://www.acdvienna.org/artImpact2030-manifesto)



**ACD-Agency for Cultural Diplomacy initiative for the UN Global Goals 2030**  
[www.acdvienna.org](http://www.acdvienna.org)

As an ACD--Agency for Cultural Diplomacy Ambassador for the *Let's Brick!- Platform*, I received an introduction to the concept to the ***Let's Brick-Method*** for intercultural exchange and constructive communication <https://www.acdvienna.org/let-s-brick/> and to the **ArtImpact2030 Initiative** <https://www.acdvienna.org/artimpact>, both developed by the ACD-Agency for Cultural Diplomacy president, Ms. Tatjana Christelbauer with the aim to support the realisation of the United Nations Global Goals through quality education and educational partnerships.

The ArtImpact2030-initiative started in 2018 with a presentation of the ArtImpact2030-Manifesto, which was created by Ms. Christelbauer, who was inspired by art and ecological thought of the Austrian born, international artist, Hundertwasser, by creation of the document and activities in the field of cultural diplomacy.

Ms. Christelbauer and the Hundertwasser Private Foundation have kindly supported my participation in the project *Houses without Borders* by use of images (Hundertwasser's art work) and by introduction to the UN SDGs and Hundertwasser's art and architecture (T. Christelbauer).

-- Megan Oteri



CEO/Founder, Brick Scholars

United States *Let's Brick!-Platform* for the ACD-Agency for Cultural Diplomacy