

Richard Hunt's 'Book Bird' to be Unveiled at the Obama Presidential Center

As the first artist commissioned for the Obama Presidential Center, Richard Hunt created "Book Bird" as a tribute to education and freedom.

CHICAGO, CA, UNITED STATES, June 16, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The [Richard Hunt Legacy Foundation](#) is proud to celebrate the installation of "[Book Bird](#)" (2023) at the Obama Presidential Center—a breathtaking sculpture by the late, internationally renowned American sculptor, Richard Hunt. President Barack Obama selected Richard Hunt as the first artist commissioned to create an artwork for the center on Chicago's South Side. Hunt's "Book Bird" is on view in the center's Chicago Public Library's Reading Garden, which opens to the public on June 19, 2026.



Installation view of "Book Bird" (2023) by Richard Hunt, Obama Presidential Center, Chicago © 2026 The Richard Hunt Estate/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York © The Obama Foundation, Photo: Taylor Glascock

"We are profoundly moved to see 'Book Bird' take its place at the Obama Presidential Center's library garden," says Jon Ott, Executive Director of the Richard Hunt Legacy Foundation. "As one of Richard Hunt's final public commissions, this sculpture beautifully synthesizes his lifelong exploration of flight, freedom, and intellectual growth. The placement of the sculpture is particularly poignant—Richard Hunt grew up reading books at the Chicago Public Library, where his mother, Etoria Hunt, was one of the city's first Black female librarians."

In addition, the Richard Hunt Legacy Foundation is excited to announce that visitors can discover "Book Bird" in person or virtually as one of the stops on its [Bloomberg Connects South Side Chicago Public Art Tour](#). The tour engages visitors with several important Richard Hunt public monuments in Chicago, including "The Light of Truth: Ida B. Wells National Monument" (2021), "Jacob's Ladder" (1977), and "Building Growing" (2012), among others.

Richard Hunt's "Book Bird" stands as a testament to the emancipatory power of knowledge. Hunt, who considered this prestigious commission a tremendous honor, spent his seven-decade career championing political and artistic freedom and commemorating African American icons through his visionary public works.

Inspired by the award Hunt created in 1985 for the United Negro College Fund to honor philanthropic champions of higher education, "Book Bird" depicts a bird taking wing from the pages of an open book, serving as a powerful visual metaphor for the freedom and social uplift that education provides.



Installation view of Book Bird (2023) by Richard Hunt, Obama Presidential Center, Chicago © 2026 The Richard Hunt Estate/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York © The Obama Foundation, Photo: Taylor Glascock

The Obama Presidential Center's "Book Bird" is an invitation to the community, challenging all who walk beneath its wings to embrace the liberating currents of learning and imagination. Created as one of the last monuments prior to his passing, Hunt observed that "Book Bird" encapsulates the "progress one can make through reading and study. This 'Book Bird' helps you to take wing yourself."

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*Jon Ott, Executive Director of
the Richard Hunt Legacy
Foundation*

About Richard Hunt

Born on the South Side of Chicago, Richard Hunt (1935–2023) is recognized as one of the most important sculptors the nation has ever produced. Throughout his monumental career, he made the largest contribution to public art in the United States, creating more than 160

public sculpture commissions gracing prominent locations across 24 states and Washington, D.C.

Richard Hunt was a celebrated American metal sculptor who was the subject of more than 200 solo exhibitions, more than 350 group exhibitions, and featured as the first African American sculptor to have a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in 1971. His metal sculpture is notable for its widespread presence in more than 130 museum collections. Among

his works, Hunt paid tribute to some of his nation's greatest heroes, including Martin Luther King, Jr., Mary McLeod Bethune, Jesse Owens, Hobart Taylor, Jr., and Ida B. Wells-Barnett.

Richard Hunt considered artistic freedom to be the most important aspect of his career: "I am interested more than anything else in being a free person. To me, that means that I can make what I want to make, regardless of what anyone else thinks I should make."



RICHARD HUNT LEGACY FOUNDATION

Logo for the Richard Hunt Legacy Foundation

Richard Hunt served on dozens of boards, committees, and councils during his lifetime, including serving as a Commissioner for the National Museum of American Art, part of the Smithsonian Institution, and as the first African American visual artist to serve on the National Council on the Arts. In addition, Hunt received more than 45 major awards, including the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship, the Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Sculpture Center, the Fifth Star Award from the City of Chicago, and the Legends and Legacy Award from the Art Institute of Chicago.

About the Richard Hunt Legacy Foundation

The Richard Hunt Legacy Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that advances public awareness, education, and appreciation of the art and life of American sculptor Richard Hunt. The Richard Hunt Legacy Foundation's vision is to ensure that future generations fully appreciate Richard Hunt by encouraging, inspiring, facilitating, educating, and supporting the public's understanding of his work and his place in American and art history. In addition, the foundation aims to inspire the next generation of sculptors and artists.

Photos

Installation view of "Book Bird" (2023) by Richard Hunt, Obama Presidential Center, Chicago
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