

# café PRAIRIE

Toward an Architecture Policy for Canada

## CANADIAN ARCHITECTURE FORUMS ON EDUCATION FORUMS CANADIENS D'ARCHITECTURE SUR L'ÉDUCATION

# NEWS

March 6, 2020



“ Looking back to  
move forward.”

- Ryan Gorrie  
Architect at Brook McIlroy

### CAFÉ Prairie

CAFÉ Prairie was hosted on February 28<sup>th</sup> 2020 at the University of Manitoba, on original lands of Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene peoples, and on the homeland of the Métis Nation. As the site for the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, and with its strong commitment to Indigenous achievement, the University of Manitoba was a fitting venue to support a special CAFÉ conversation on Indigenous principles, perspectives and practices in shaping Canada's architecture.

#### Nation-to-Nation

The morning started with a smudge and song ceremony led by the **Kind Hart Women Singers**. Scented smoke, rhythmic drums and multiple Indigenous filled Centre Space of the John A. Russell Building, the first purpose-built architecture school in Canada. University of Manitoba architecture students and members of the newly-founded Indigenous Design and Planning Student Association (IDPSA), **Danielle Desjarlais** and **Reanna Merasty**, introduced and moderated the conversation. Entitled *Nation-to-Nation*, the panel discussion aimed to deepen understanding of multiple First Nations communities; to acknowledge Canada's commitment to nation-to-nation relations with First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples

based on recognition of rights, respect and co-operation; and to ask how architects can help advance the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. The panel was generously sponsored by the Manitoba Association of Architects.

**David Fortin**, member of the Métis Nation of Ontario and director of the McEwen School of Architecture at Laurentian University, began by presenting architecture's role in fostering relationships, reciprocity and respect. The McEwen school aims to instill these values by incorporating Indigenous content throughout the curriculum in studies of ecology, cultural sustainability, precedents and history, and through land-based teachings, ceremony, language and engagement with elders.

Anishinaabe architect and senior associate at Brook McIlroy, **Ryan Gorrie**, shared a vision of "looking back to move forward," embracing a multi-generational approach to learning and design. Through examples of award-winning built projects, he showed the potential to meaningfully recover rich stories and histories of Indigenous cultures in vital and contemporary ways.

**Roxanne Greene**, Anishinaabe councillor for Shoal Lake 40, emphasized the role of dialogue and respect in all partnerships. Most important, she stressed, is an open heart. Roxanne's recent design-build collaboration with University of Manitoba students, Indigenous scholar Shawn Bailey, and Shoal Lake residents and Elders exemplifies possibilities for community partnerships.

Gixsan Nation artist, author, storyteller and Prairie Climate Centre technician, **Brett Huson**, called on architects to *truly* "acknowledge the land" as that which we inherit and become responsible for; and as that which we come from and return to. The

land shapes us and we must give back to it – ten times what we take.

**Amina Lalor**, a Métis-Irish-Vietnamese graduate student at the University of Waterloo's School of Architecture and co-founder of *Treaty Lands Global Stories*, challenged architects to critically acknowledge the colonial nature their practice, and to attempt a deep site analysis of where they work through decolonizing place narratives. Her collaborative project with University of Guelph Indigenous scholars called *Nokum's House* provides one possibility for a land-based research lab.

**Nicole Luke**, an urban Inuk born in Yellowknife, now pursuing a M.Arch at the University of Manitoba, described an apparent disconnect between architectural education and northern communities, as well as opportunities for work and research. She also speculated on how an architecture policy might help bridge gaps, while ensuring sustainability and Inuit autonomy.

**Cheyenne Thomas**, designer and RAIC Indigenous Task Force member, addressed the challenges experienced by many Indigenous students attending university while acknowledging recent positive changes, evidenced by the increasing number of Indigenous architecture students, mutual support networks, and open discussions like the one underway.

The panel conversation elaborated on many of these topics. All participants were inspired to seriously consider what grounds them as designers; to make space for true agency and expression; to hold governments and institutions accountable for promises; and to rally around concerns that unite non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples, such as care for the planet, land, water and future generations.



“ I hope to be a part of the movement to bring environmental and architectural aspects to arctic infrastructure and inspire Inuit youth. ”

- Nicole Luke  
M.Arch Student, University of Manitoba



### CAFÉ Conversations

After sharing a meal of bison stew, provided by Indigenous-owned Feast Café Bistro, participants reconvened for an afternoon of presentations and consultations.

CAFÉ Project Lead, **Lisa Landrum**, relayed the impetus for these SSHRC-supported trans-national conversations, intended to involve students in defining the scope and aims of an architecture policy for Canada. University of Manitoba M.Arch students and graduate representatives, **Jessica Piper** and **Tia Watson**, described the experiential learning aspects of the Faculty of Architecture, including community-outreach and design-build opportunities. **Johanna Hurme**, co-founder of the award-winning Winnipeg firm 5468796 Architecture, stressed that any architecture policy must address the “missing middle” – through sustainable development, specific measurable targets, incentives, quality-based selection processes, and education. **Julia Nakanishi**, M.Arch student at the University of Waterloo, shared initiatives she has led as co-director of the BRIDGE Centre for Architecture and Design. These include a recent interactive exhibition called *Common Waters*, examining the future of communities in relation to a transforming environment. **Sarah Cooper**, professor of City Planning at the University of Manitoba, addressed the specific challenge of de-commodifying and de-colonizing “home” and the general imperative that policy reform be an agent of social justice. **Nik Luka**, professor of Architecture and Urban Planning at McGill University, described strategies of “unforgetting” the wrongs of the past through curriculum reform and community engagement. M.Arch students from UBC’s School of Architecture + Landscape Architecture (SALA), **Emilia Brasdefer**, **Thomas Foster** and **Halley Sveinson**,

outlined various streams of student-led social and environmental activism, and posed specific questions as to how any architecture policy would advance positive potential in areas of human and animal rights, inclusive urbanism and sustainability. **Monica Giesbrecht**, landscape architect and principal at HTFC Planning & Design, shared an ethos of humility and open-mindedness in approaching design. She also highlighted the potential for collaborative research and outreach projects to instill a love of landscape among youth and to create more sustainable communities. **Max Vos Coupal**, M.Arch student at Laurentian University, presented an overview of the people, place and material sensibilities defining the McEwen School of Architecture community. UBC architecture professor **John Bass** stressed the importance of simple yet powerful communication skills for any architect, and described four overlapping modes of practice crucial to the evolving profession: artisan, ecologist, industrialist and activist. **Wins Bridgman**, co-director of BridgmanCollaborative Architecture demonstrated the firm’s motto of *making public work* by sharing activist-designs engaging humor, metaphor and direct calls for social equity. Finally, McGill University architecture students **Odile Lamy**, **Michael Kurt Mayer** and **Olivier Therrien** presented a series of pedagogical strategies aimed at learning how to engage unpredictability, to work with communities, to model environmental systems, and to value processes of formation over form.

Fueled by the examples and advocacy of the presenters, CAFÉ participants turned to focus on more intimate round-table conversations addressing specific themes of architecture’s impact on Place, People, Prosperity and Potential.

### Provocations and Questions

While difficult to synthesize the full day of discourse, two guest respondents provided key concluding remarks at the end of CAFÉ Prairie. **Rafico Ruiz**, Associate Director of Research at the Canadian Centre for Architecture, highlighted the inspirational atmosphere in the room and the invention of new relationships and possibilities formed through dialogue. He encouraged participants to engage cultural institutions, like the CCA, and to help ensure they are reflecting goals and aspirations of the communities they serve. He also provocatively asked how an architecture policy might be manifested as an exhibition, and what would be its interactive medium and rousing title.

**Andrea Rounce**, University of Manitoba Political Studies professor, posed a series of questions grounded in her expertise in public administration: What would a successful policy look like? How would we know it’s successful? What assumptions are design professionals and students making about social change? Who drives this change? And, who prevents it? Is public policy sufficient to make change, or does it also require that change be undertaken by the people and professions represented in this event?

CAFÉ Prairie culminated with a tour of design studios and the CAFÉ CAFÉ exhibition in the Arch2 Gallery, and a social mixer.

As a personal observation, at the end of this CAFÉ (as with all of them), and especially upon hearing the student table captains, I have felt convinced that positive that change is underway and the future of architecture is in good hands.

The fifth and final CAFÉ will be held at the University of Calgary’s City Building Design Lab on March 12, 2020.

/Lisa Landrum