



CONNECTICUT ARCHITECTURE FOUNDATION

2020 CAF GALA

By Michael J. Crosbie, FAIA

The annual Connecticut Architecture Foundation (CAF) Gala for 2020 took a radically new form than in the past. Instead of gathering in person, architects and allied professionals assembled virtually online for a lecture by recipients of the 2020 CAF Distinguished Leadership Award, followed by a panel discussion on preparing the next generation of architects to address technology, sustainability, and diversity. The event was hosted by CAF President Stephanie Degen-Monroe, AIA, and myself, underwritten by dozens of supporters of the CAF.

New York-based architects Hani Rashid and Lise-Ann Couture of Asymptote Architecture presented a stimulating lecture as part of the University of Hartford Architecture Lecture series (supported by the JCJ Architecture Endowment of the Department of Architecture). The lecture theme, "Urban Returns," was an opportunity to present international projects that addressed urbanism. Rashid noted that their work reflects an interest in how architecture and the public realm interact, "always in a symbiotic relationship."

Some projects were interventions in the urban fabric, temporary "installations" such as one for the atrium of the Guggenheim Museum in New York, and an "E_Station" at the Audi City Lab exhibit in Milan. These "Invention Spaces" are purposely ambiguous in their function—the intent is to invite users to engage them as the moment inspires, "allowing people to form a relationship with it," explained Rashid. Couture noted that the environments were not overly programmed so that they could be manipulated.



The architect-couple also discussed works on the edge of urban precincts, such as seaport terminals proposed in Taiwan and Miami, which allow the city and its residents to flow under elevated structures. Two projects created "cultural anchors" in the urban context that encourage the free exchange of city dwellers and visitors between green space and cultural institutions. Two museums (one in Budapest, the other in Moscow) demonstrated how the open architecture, rather than hermetic, would reach out to adjacent neighborhoods and parks. "Civic elegance" was the theme of two projects--artists' studios in South

Korea and a hotel at a Formula One racetrack in Abu Dubai—expressed in sinuous curves and pristine forms in response to the sites and their cultural contexts.

The panel discussion that followed include Rashid and Couture along with Philip Bernstein, FAIA, of Yale; Stephen White, AIA, from Roger Williams University; Ming Thompson, AIA, of ATELIER CHO THOMPSON; and Jeffrey Brown, AIA, of TSKP Studio. The panel (moderated by myself) discussed how we might educate the next generation of architects for a profession in radical transformation.

Bernstein stressed that, rather than just technical training, the next generation needs to "think about technology, how it is changing," while Couture noted that young architects need to be "resourceful and creative in their approach to problems." Regarding sustainable design, Rashid urged the profession to sometimes look backward as well as forward to combat what he sees as "the absence of memory in the profession. We are part of a long history of environmental sustainability," evident in older and indigenous architecture. White concurred, urging practitioners and students to explore "material simplicity" as a path to more sustainable architecture. In terms of diversity, Brown noted that the architecture community offers a wealth of experience from different cultural perspectives, which should be mined for design inspiration. Thompson noted that architecture schools are far ahead of the profession when it comes to diversity, "because students are driving this." She closed the discussion with an expression of hope in the next generation of architects, many of whom are "looking to expand the boundaries of traditional practice."

The author is a Professor of Architecture at the University of Hartford and a Connecticut Architecture Foundation board member.