

PUBLIC INTEREST

REDEFINING THE ARCHITECT'S ROLE IN AND RESPONSIBILITY TO SOCIETY

EMERGING PROFESSIONALS TRAVEL SCHOLARSHIP 2017
GARRETT NELLI



ARCHITECTURE'S IDENTITY CRISIS

What does society require of its architects today? Historically, the architectural profession has developed to fulfill the short-term capitalistic needs of the few, rather than considering the long-term well being of the many¹. This model of practice is no longer applicable to the issues we face today, finding architecture in the midst of an identity crisis. A movement towards public interest design, however, has architects redefining their role and responsibility to society. This year's Venice Biennial, "Reporting from the Front," advances the idea that architecture is not only a product, but a process that empowers diverse individuals to engage in meaningful conversation about improving their condition. We architects must re cultivate our traditional processes and practices to promote public engagement and enrich cross interdisciplinary dialogue. If the time is taken to form real relationships and connections with our communities, architecture, planning, and design can become transformative engines for profound change in society.

"There is a chance that everything we did was incorrect, but stasis is itself criminal for those with the means to move and the means to weave communion between people" - Dave Eggers

left_ members of Orkistudio interact with local children during the construction of their future school¹.



left_ The \$850 million CCTV Headquarters contrast slums in Beijing.



right_ Keith Haring posing with fellow collaborators in front of their Chicago mural².

“Seattle is the same city today that it was yesterday...guided by equality and inclusion and openness.” - Mayor Ed Murray

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Racial tensions, power disparity, and widespread xenophobia stand at the forefront of our current political situation, leaving our country more divided than ever. Architecture, historically, has had little societal influence but Anthony Ward describes that “architecture is still nothing but social”, yet consumed by capitalism, the profession has supported the existing power structures and more often than not, served as a mechanism of oppression. As a result, “billions of people around the world, battle the storms of inadequate services, unaffordable housing, and unsafe neighborhood on a daily basis” while “architects affect only about two to five percent of all that gets built”. Public interest design counters this notion by breaking the

traditionally closed loop of professional expertise to include community leaders and local stakeholders to best serve the broader public good².

In the 1990's, street violence was at an all time high when Keith Haring collaborated with 500 Chicago inner-city students on a mural in the heart of Chicago's Millenial Park. This 450 ft multi-colored statement stood as a commentary on the camaraderie that existed among these diverse young citizens even in the face of growing adversity³. This contemporary participatory art project repositioned the artist as an engaged facilitator, rather than the sole practitioner of objects. Public interest design similarly

redefines the designer-client and designer-societal roles through active community engagement in the design process².

This research proposal seeks to explore how architectural intervention in the form of public interest design can promote positive change in society and the architectural profession. In a city that faces unparalleled urbanization, a homeless epidemic, and the political unrest, the AIA Seattle has the opportunity to declare a practice of inclusivity and equality.

PUBLIC INTEREST DESIGN

Public interest design, or sometimes referred to as community-engaged design, is a process driven approach that focuses on integrating local representatives, experts, and stakeholders from the community into the design process in order to achieve the most encompassing design solution for all. Championed by the idea that good design is a right not a privilege, it “exist in tension between professionalism and idealism” harnessing local knowledge with design skills and thinking to challenge the status quo in society. This movement accepts the challenge that Whitney Young proposed to the AIA in 1968, that architecture must address society’s economic, environmental, and social issues - the triple bottom line⁴.



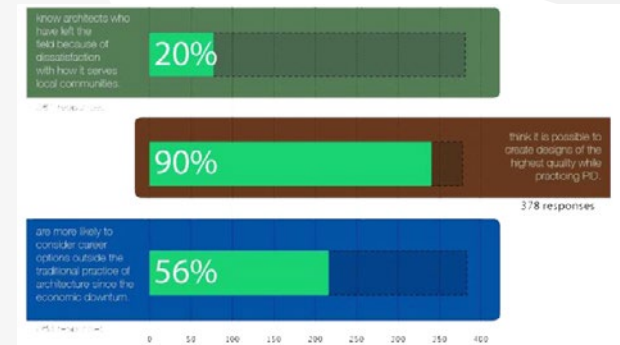
top_designers are entering the field to make an impact⁴.

“You are not a profession that has distinguished itself by your social and civic contributions to the cause of civil rights, and I am sure this does not come to you as any shock. You are most distinguished by your thunderous silence and your complete irrelevance.”

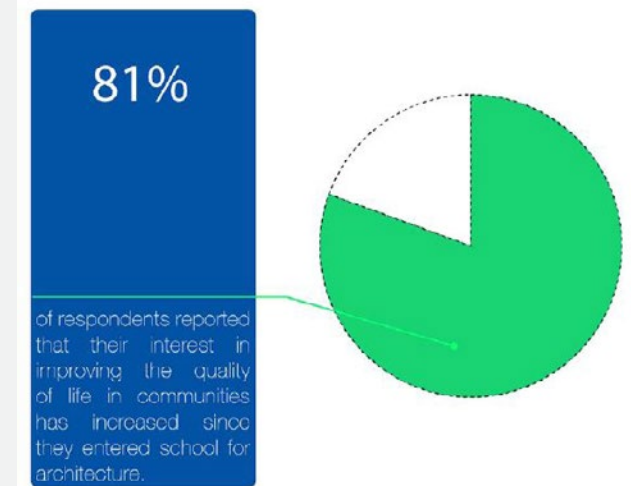
- Whitney Young, 1968 National Convention

AN EMERGING FIELD

Public interest design is an emerging sector in the architectural profession that has become a powerful movement in the US and around the globe over the past decades. Architectural ideologies shifted towards public interest design during the 1960’s civil rights movement and resurfaced when the recession hit in 2007. This opened the door for public and philanthropic design to flourish while for-profit work came to a screeching halt. Research collected that after the recession, 56% of designers surveyed considered some other architectural fields outside of the traditional practice of architecture in their long-term career goals. Designers made this transition by leveraging their unique skills to address injustices through architectural intervention. This paved the way for progressive nontraditional business models that focused on the needs of the public rather than the conventional privatized client⁴.



top_56% of respondents are pursuing nontraditional architectural work⁴.



top_architecture school has increased the desire for public interest work in students⁴.

NEW MODELS OF PRACTICE

Public interest design business models offer a wide variety of complex strategies to garner economic, political, and material support that push the boundaries of traditional architectural practice. This flexibility in business operations and innovative protocol allows for the role of the architect to be more fluid and adaptive to meet the complex needs of the public⁵. Two categories of public interest practice exist; for-profit and non-profit.

"It's clear that social impact design work requires soft skills that would likely be classified as "non traditional" in mainstream architecture practice.. often necessitating roles that may not have previously existed within a firm"
- Elaine Asal, Senior Associate, Gensler Baltimore

PRO BONO

This work comprises 1 to 10 percent of the total work load at firms, free of charge. Perkins + Will's Social Responsibility Initiative is considered the longest running pro bono program. This service includes "a 15 person firm working full time to provide pro bono services" on a variety of projects.



left_ Perkins + Will's Sow Much Good farm stand offers locally grown, chemical-free produce for the Charlotte community."

INTEGRATED-PRACTICE

Integrated-practices perform a combination of public interest design and conventional work for-profit. David Baker and Partners Architects portfolio consists 50% of non-profit affordable housing projects that are built at a reduced fee⁴.

right_ the Richardson Apartments offer affordable housing in San Francisco.



INDEPENDENT NON-PROFIT

The non-profit designation allows for fund raising through a variety of means in order to address global issues. “Franchised” organizations such as Architects Without Borders and Architecture for Humanity, utilize the flexibility of local chapters with the open source knowledge and support of the national organization⁴.

right_the Mahiga Rainwater Court by Architecture for Humanity serves as a cultural center and water collector for this remote village.



UNIVERSITY LED DESIGN-BUILD

Multi-disciplinary design-build programs teach students about socially and culturally responsible design through deep community engagement. Auburns Rural Studio has been working with the community in west Alabama since 1993 to meet the needs of the people through design⁴.



right_Rural studio's 20k homes initiative designs and builds homes for locals for under \$20,000.

DEVELOPMENT

This model expands the role of public interest practitioners to realize the work of both designers and traditional developers. This business model opens the opportunity for new building typologies and sets the precedent to impact building codes and regulations⁴.

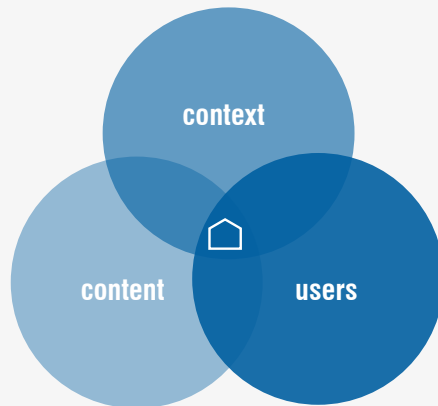


left_creative interpretations of codes and density bonuses allowed ABC to add two more units to this tightly packed urban site.

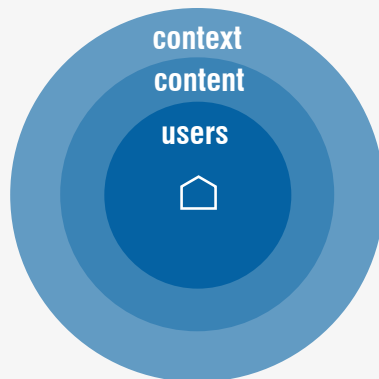
FOUNDATION

Foundations such as the Gate Foundation, Kellogg, Ford, and Surdna are providing strong support for design as an essential service for communities in need of water, infrastructure, energy, and public work. Emerging public interest practice non-profit MASS design group received their first project, funded by Partners in Health, to design a hospital in Butaro, Rwanda⁴.

right_Partners in Health's Butaro District Hospital provided the jumping pad for MASS Design Group.



top_traditional design closed loop model



top_public interest design inclusive model

PEDAGOGICAL SHIFT

For designers to adequately serve communities in the twenty-first century they must adapt and evolve. By shifting from being product driven to process driven, public interest design radically diverges from conventional architectural practice and theory. This evolution in pedagogy expands the reach and range of contemporary issues design can impact through inclusivity. By integrating knowledge from the fields of architecture, landscape architecture, and planning as well as social activism there are new opportunities for firms, young professionals, and students to create real impact in society.⁶

The public's needs requires multi-faceted designers whose expertise expands beyond just technical knowledge. Practitioners are thus expanding their roles and professional services to include advocacy, planning, and research to increase the potential cultural impact of design. Above all, the role of



top_the inclusion of all community stakeholders is both, an educational and empowering act.

educator may have the most impactful ripple effect. Paulo Freire explains “making real oppression more oppressive through the realization of oppression is essential because it acts as the motivation to engage in the innate struggle for humanization”⁷. Community participation in the design process is sparking this realization that builds critical awareness and empowers individual to take action towards liberation.

A GLOBAL MOVEMENT

This year's Venice Biennale, *Reporting From the Front*, is a call for action to the design community to improve the living conditions for people all over the world. Countless designers from around the globe are showcased at this exhibition designing for the "98 percent without architects", fighting back against the forces at play that threaten our built environment. Curator and Pritzker Prize winner, Alejandro Aravena, explains further that "we would like to learn from architectures that despite the scarcity of means intensify what is available instead of complaining about what is missing. We would like to understand what design tools are needed to subvert the forces that privilege the individual gain over the collective benefit."⁸

Promoting these stores at the Biennale is not only to raise awareness but showcase this movement within the architectural profession on a global stage. In his home country of Chile, Alejandro Aravena's design firm, Elemental, has been tackling issues of low-income housing in a creative and sensible manner. His "half

finished" housing typology provides the framework for a medium sized family home but only fully builds the half that contains living necessities such as the kitchen and bathrooms. This framework allows families the freedom to expand their homes to meet their specific needs. Guided by the principles of empowerment and equality, at home and abroad, the public interest design movement is fighting the battle for a better built environment⁹.

"I think this may be the moment that design has waited for, that design has need... the next generation of designers... who can be the pioneers of an entirely new way of designing for the public good, at a scale and a pace that we've never seen before."

-John Cary, social activist

bottom _Elemental's "half finished" housing typology provides the essentials, while building the framework for expansion.



RESEARCH GOALS

To explore the impacts of public interest design as both an emerging sector in the architectural profession and an agent of positive change in society.

This research catalogs six architectural interventions that have transformed communities by means of innovative public interest design and construction. This will entail interviewing six design teams to explore how their nontraditional practices operate, sustain, and acquire work. The specificity of this study will highlight, through on site interviews, how local communities contributed to these designs and how these designs contributed to improving the communities' condition. The design process will be the subject matter and the users will be the lens for observation. An electronic publication will summarize these field findings and will be distributed to AIA Seattle member firms. A final exhibition will culminate this research in the form of a series of still images portraying the projects, their context, and users with corresponding narratives. Accompanying each design will be a "practice blueprint" which will unmask the project delivery methods. *This exhibition seeks to dramatically profess the impact architects can play in serving society while revealing the means and methods to do so.* The lofty aspiration of this research proposal is to inspire the viewer to boldly resist business as usual and take an active role in improving the quality of our built environment.

Total cost ~ \$4,900

► Public interest design as an emerging professional sector

- Explore how public interest design practices acquire work, operate, and differ from traditional firms.
 - Interview six selected practices to discuss their business models and project delivery methods.
- Research how the sector is expanding and in what ways can the AIA support its growth.
 - Interview Byran Bell, founder of public interest design non-profit DesignCorps, for future areas of expansion and growth in the field.
- Electronic publication cataloging interview responses and field research for the availability of the AIA Seattle member firms.

► Architect's expanding role and expertise

- How are architects expanding their roles to meet the complex needs of the public.
 - Interview six selected practices to learn how each project required skills and expertise beyond that of traditional architects.
 - What new processes and strategies are being implored to improve community involvement.
 - What new areas of expertise do these firms see being pertinent in order for the field to expand.
- Electronic publication cataloging the findings for the availability of the AIA Seattle member firms.

► Community engagement and societal impact

- What is the reach and cultural impact of public interest design.
 - Visit six architectural sites and interview individual users to assess the cultural impact.
 - Identify the specific issues being addressed that separate these projects from traditional work.
- Electronic publication cataloging interview responses and field research for the availability of the AIA Seattle member firms.

► Public interest design awareness

- Final exhibition cataloging projects as a series of three portraits, portraying content, context, and user with accompanying narratives.
- "Practice blueprints" depicting the six distinct project delivery methods.

INNER-CITY ARTS

Los Angeles, CA
Michael Maltzan Architecture
Integrated Practice

Inner-City Arts campus provides arts education for over 10,000 at-risk youth from LA public schools each year. The non-profit school campus houses a range of art facilities and serves as an community oasis in the city¹⁰.

~ \$120 airfare
~ \$40 food/2 days

Contact - Jen Lathrop, Director of Business Development & Communications



ST. JOSEPH'S REBUILD CENTER

New Orleans, LA
Detriot Community Design Center
Non-profit

The St. Joseph ReBuild Center is a unique collaboration between four independent non-profit service providers. Their union establishes a more comprehensive approach of providing care and support to the homeless population of New Orleans¹¹.

~ \$220 airfare
~ \$50 hostel/ 2 nights
~ \$40 food/ 3 days

Contact - Wayne Troyer, Design Principal



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20K HOME

Footwash, AL
Rural Studio
University Led Design-Build

Rural Studio launched its affordable-housing program in 2005, where they have been experimenting and prototyping a new locally-built rural home, known as “the 20K Home”. The goal is to design a market-rate model home that could be built by a contractor for \$20,000¹².

~ \$100 rental car
 ~ \$30 food/ 3 days

Contact - Natalie Butts-ball, 20K Homes

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GHEKIO CHOLERA TREATMENT CENTER

Port-au-Prince, Haiti
MASS Design Group
Non-profit

In partnership with leading Haitian health care provider Les Centres GHEKIO, MASS designed and built a state-of-the-art permanent cholera treatment center in the wake of the 2010 catastrophic earthquake¹³.

~ \$300 airfare
 ~ \$50 accommodations/ 2 nights
 ~ \$30 food/3 days

Contact - Thatcher Bean, Advocacy and Media

BANCA POPOLARE ETICA HEADQUARTERS

Padua, Italy
TAM Associates
Integrated practice,

TAM Associates conceived of and designed, through community engagement, the first citizen credit union in Padua. This project sets a new precedent for the role architecture can play in the political environment.¹⁴

~ \$800 airfare
~ \$100 accommodations/ 3 nights
~ \$50 food/4 days

Contact - Laura Candelperghe, Architect



OPERA VILLAGE AFRICA

Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
Kéré Architecture
Integrated Practice,

Located in one of the poorest nations in the world, this master plan includes classrooms for up to 500 students, a variety of housing types, art and media labs, workshops and dining facilities¹⁵.

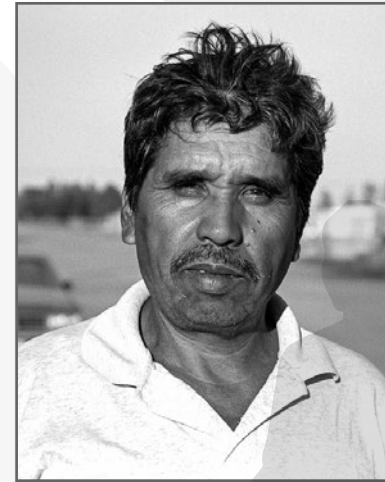
~ \$400 airfare - \$1200 airfare to Seattle
~ \$60 accommodations/ 1 night
~ \$30 food/4 days
~ \$100 rental car

Contact - Aino Laberenz, Managing Partner



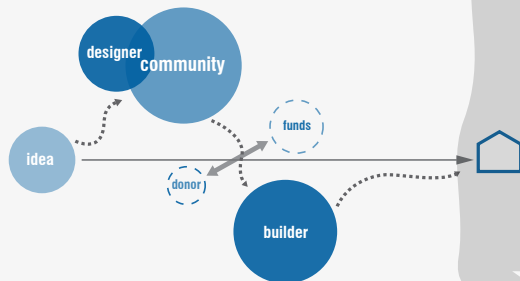
Exhibition ~ \$400

1



right_example of proposed exhibition depicting a design's content, context, user, narratives, and practice blueprint.

practice blueprint



Many of the assumptions that have long guided the field of architecture no longer seem relevant to the challenges we now face not only as a profession and discipline, but as a civilization. . . Nor can we assume that the practices that have guided architectural practice in the 20th century will serve us in the 21st.” - 2011 Latrobe Prize Announcement

FINAL REMARKS TO THE AIA SEATTLE

It is critical that the architectural profession reestablish its cultural relevance in the twenty-first century. Through engaging communities, addressing the triple bottom line, and discovering new areas of expertise, the architectural field can expand its influence farther than ever before.

► To ensure growth in this challenging and complex field requires the assistance of the AIA Seattle.

- *Educating the profession* about the value of public interest design is essential to expanding architecture's potential reach.
- *Showcasing practices* that achieve sustainable business models will dismiss the belief that lack of funding and time are impenetrable barriers to entry.
- *Highlighting* the power of a *community engaged design process* communicates the profound cultural impact architecture can achieve.
- The integration of public interest design into the AIA, will solidify *progressive change in the profession*.

The entailed research proposal seeks to achieve these goals and to inspire AIA Seattle members to join those emerging practices, professionals, and citizens who wish to work for the betterment of our communities in Seattle and around the world.

APPALACHIA TO SEATTLE

My interest in this field of research started as an undergraduate at the University of Tennessee Knoxville, when I had the opportunity to participate in a design build seminar addressing the lack of a sanitary water supply in Beverly, Kentucky, one of the poorest counties in the nation. The year-long design process required extensive user engagement and feedback, generating a broader cultural understanding to best support the communities needs. We delivered a scheme that in one year has dispensed over 5,000 gallons of water, hosts the community farmers market, serves as a social watering hole, and harvests rainwater for the community garden. What we were offering the locals was more than architecture, but the tools and critical awareness to improve their condition.

bottom_weekly farmers market.

right_dispensers provide 5 gallons of water for \$.25.



top_the completed kiosk has dispensed over 5,000 gallons of water to a population of roughly 9,000 residents.

It occurred to me that *“architecture is a process, not a product. A process which empowers and enables people in their community.”*⁵ A process that is deeply interwoven with social justice, finance, politics, healthcare, community relations, along with the ultimate goal of elevating the human condition. When approached as such the architect's role transcends the built environment and encompasses that of an activist, a facilitator, and a steward of society.

> **PUBLIC INTEREST** : REDEFINING THE ARCHITECT'S ROLE IN AND RESPONSIBILITY TO SOCIETY

Education

The pavilion serves as an educational tool for healthy living and disaster awareness.



Community

A large flexible pavilion space accommodates a variety of communal gatherings.



Health

The weekend farmers market gathers under the canopy to sell fresh organic produce.

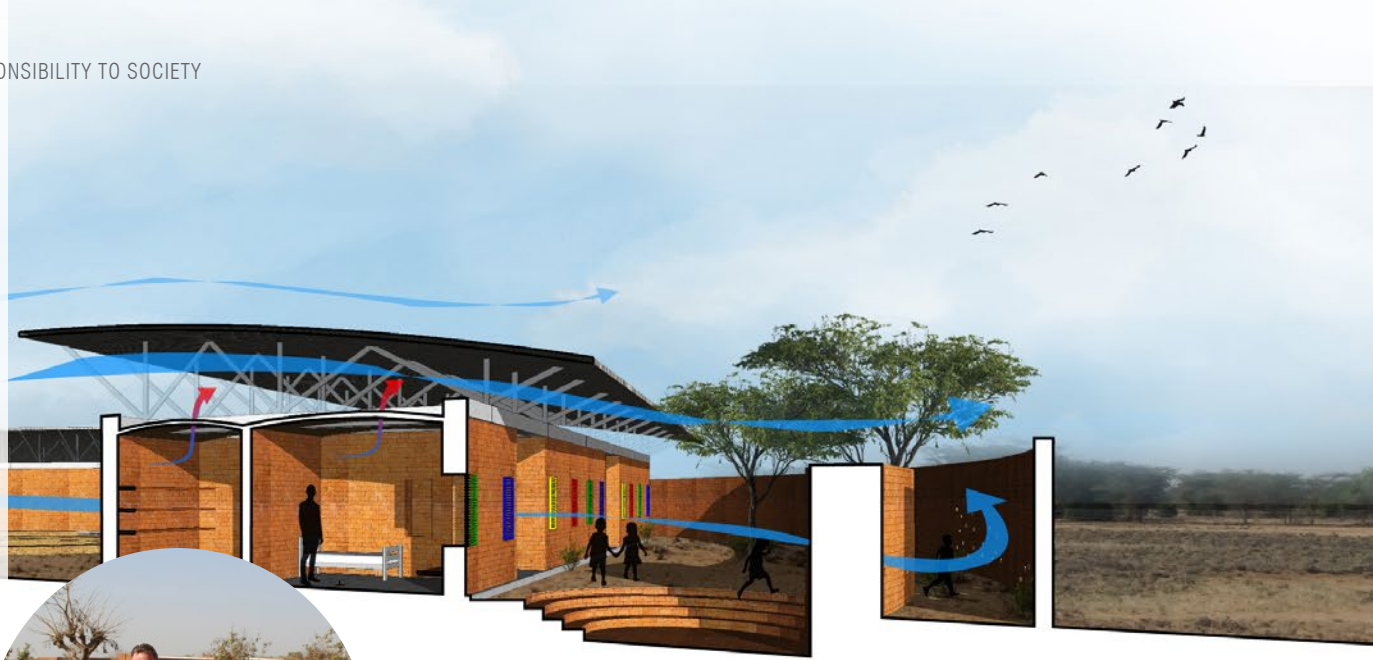


INFANT RESCUE CENTER

Dano, Burkina Faso

Architects Without Borders - Seattle

Since 2010 the infant rescue program has been caring for and saving the lives of more than 250 infants under the age of two who have been orphaned, abandoned, or are suffering from malnutrition or failure to thrive. The newly designed infant rescue center will provide medical treatment and living accommodations for these infants. By balancing a design that is both welcoming and secure, these infants have the opportunity to thrive. Architectural elements such as deep overhangs, sunken courtyards, and mass walls create ideal indoor/outdoor micro climates in this hot and humid climate.

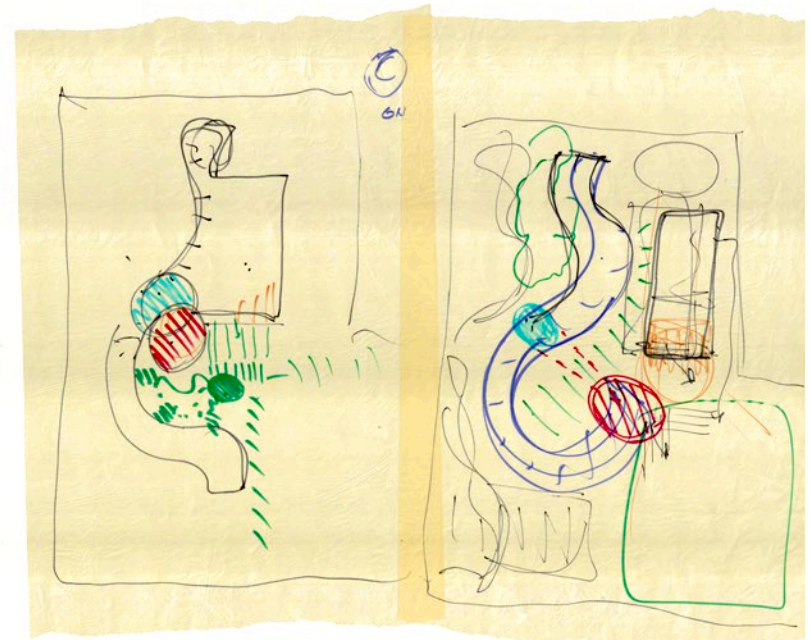


WING LUKE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Seattle, WA

NAC Architecture

Wing Luke Elementary is a diverse school population that is comprised of primarily minorities and non-english speakers. The student body speaks over 13 languages and 43 percent of students require ELL assistance. This diversity has fostered a strong community and a unique learning environment. The new school design looks to celebrate Wing Luke's diversity and tightly knit bonds. Involving the families, staff, and stakeholders into the design process will ensure that the school will operate as both a premier educational facility and a community center within the neighborhood.



current projects

SOURCES

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