Article for RIAS quarterly.

FINAL DRAFT to A Summers. Rev H: 31.07.20

Theme – Activism - Missing in Architecture focus on GSA curriculum

**COMING OUT OF COVID 19. WHAT SHOULD ARCHITECTURE SCHOOLS DO NOW?**

The pandemic has thrown us from the treadmill of everyday life and given us time to confront what many have been kicking down the road for years - our lack of urgent action addressing the climate emergency and the clear imbalances of power, race, class, privilege in the world. If we look at this in relation to architecture and architectural education, it highlights the need for urgent action within schools, NOW. Our students demand it. Our planet needs it. In the UK alone the built environment contributes around 40% to the country’s total carbon footprint. That schools should tackle this as a core part of the curriculum is a given, we have no choice. The statistic is immense but it doesn’t reveal the amount of waste, global ecological destruction and exploitation which goes on behind this figure. Architectural design is inextricably and deeply connected to the ethical and fair treatment of people, our planet and its ecology. In response we need to put ethical education into the heart of what we do and provide a platform for a much wider range of voices to be heard in our teaching and our practice.

The collective, Missing in Architecture (MiA) was initiated in 2017 by a group of like-minded educators within the Mackintosh School of Architecture. Addressing climate emergency is a priority for us all, MiA’s particular modus operandi is moving the mindset to explore architectural design from both an ethical and an environmental dimension. This is not constrained to just what we teach but also how we deliver it.

The lack of diversity and parity within the profession is well documented. In relation to gender inequalities, 44% of students who enrol in architecture are female, this percentage drops during Parts 2 & 3, with retention post qualification dramatically low as 19%. In comparison to their male colleagues this figure continues to fall for females across their career lifetime. The proportion of white students entering architectural education compared to those of black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds is 68.4%, this increases to 88% at Part 3. Only 7% of students entering Part 1 are black which reduces to less than 2% at Part 3 level and beyond. Of the 1 % of students identifying as disabled most are recorded with problems of mental health, another issue within education which derserves its own article entirely. A tiny proportion, 0.006 % of our student population have a physical disability. The RIBA has no disaggregated statistics relating to class so we don’t know how many are from disadvantaged backgrounds. This raises the question, how do we design and serve well if our profession is missing the diversity we find in the communities in which we operate?

MiA work collaboratively and equitably with people to develop and support projects parallel to the curriculum.

In ‘Provocations’ we openly raised issues of gender inequality and prejudice in architecture. Our model of ‘The Institute of the Everyday’ for the 'Frankentype’ exhibition at Archi-Fringe 2018 addressed architectural design and the Equalities Act. The proposal was neither predetermined or ‘complete’ instead we provided interactive ‘tools’ of building elements and scaled people, simple and accessible enough to allow any child or adult to explore and play with architectural ideas and generate discussion. MiA also developed a network of voices through our ‘Equal Architect’ symposium held on International Women’s Day 2019. Funded by Architecture & Design Scotland / Creative Scotland, it was a collaboration with invited guests such as Sarah Wigglesworth, Jos Boys of the DisOrdinary Project, Alisha Morenike of Black Females in Architecture and Dr Harriet Harris. It was sparsely attended by our male colleagues, a timely reminder of the ‘inclusive’ issues that we face in our profession.

At the Mack, MiA and our colleagues have already implemented curriculum changes relating to diversity, sustainability, the circular economy and low energy. Projects closely combine studio and technology briefs which investigate strategies for dealing with design, construction and climate change. We explore diversity with our year 1 students, in ‘Being Human’ researching and working with disabled people, to develop creative responses through a heightened awarenesss and understanding of the senses, ergonomics and anthropometrics. We have projects where students are looking at adaptive re-use of existing buildings, such as the work of year 2 with the library in Bo’ness. We already incorporate the aims of the United Nations Sustainability Goals 2030, the Equalities Act, RIAS Sustainability Policy and the RIBA 2030 Challenge in many of our briefs. This coming year the theme of the ‘ethical city’ allows our final year students to develop their own architectural position, in preparation to step into practice. There is still much more to do. The Covid19 hiatus offers opportunities to rethink and instigate further and deeper changes in our curriculum. We need to diversify and make relevant our curriculum content, change our teaching and delivery methods to support mutual respect, allow wider range of voices and importantly listen, absorb and act. Moving online allows us to rethink studio culture and structures of delivery for the better. Our students show appetite and deep intention to address the issues we face, working with them, Schools can build curriculums of integrity to equip our students to confidently tackle the ecological and ethical imbalances of the world beyond academia.

With the best will in the world, the super tanker nature of academia still wants to chug in the old direction but somehow, we must turn it around. Now is the opportunity to take more radical steps. This is a call to EVERYONE to make vital changes in all schools now. It can’t happen fast enough.

**USEFUL RESOURCES**

**Invisible Women. Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men.** Criado Perez, C.2019. Chatto and Windus.

This book exposes how 50% of our population has been overlooked by the world. Get angry, if this is happening to women, it also affects other sections of society excluded by an unquestioning status quo.

**Where are the Women Architects?** Stratigakos, D.2016. Princeton University Press**.**

This is an excellent book providing insight into the issues women face in architecture and practice.

**Dr Harriet Harriss, Pratt Institute – interview with Dezeen. May 2020.** <https://www.facebook.com/dezeen/videos/2658362334484465/> A great video if you want to know how a school might develop its approach to architectural education this is a place to hear some good ideas.

**DisOrdinary Project.** <http://disordinaryarchitecture.com/wp/>

Architect Jos Boys has been leading the charge for action on disability and design for many years. Some really interesting projects.

**Black Females in Architecture** <https://www.blackfemarc.com/>

A newly formed group who are doing great projects including provoking an awareness of issues of race in our profession from another perspective.

**UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030**

**RIAS Sustainability Policy**. <https://aberdeenarchitects.org/rias-sustainability-policy/>

**LETI publications.** <https://www.leti.london/publications>

**Sustainable Construction**. Halliday, S. 2019.Routledge.

**The Environmental Pocketbook**. Pelsmakers. S. 2nd Ed. 2019. RIBA Publishing.

**MISSING IN ARCHITECTURE’S CALL TO ACTION.**

* For all Scottish schools of architecture to collectively to commit NOW to focus on a core curriculum addressing sustainability and equality and for these issues to be unavoidably addressed and assessed in all projects and coursework at all levels.
* For all Scottish schools of architecture to commit and publish five year plans that integrate environmental issues, inclusive content and teaching methodolgies as core of operations.
* For all Scottish schools of architecture to commit to having a wider and more inclusive representation of voices amongst their staff, students, guests and review panels.
* For all Scottish schools of architecture to commit to addressing the barriers which exclude a diverse population of students entering architectural training. Financialy support the most vulnerable and under represented throughout their education with scholarships and busaries.
* For RIAS to commit to having a wider and more inclusive representation of voices in staffing and on committees and judging panels.
* For the profession to introduce mentoring schemes to support and encourage the retention of minorities within education and the industry.

Missing in Architecture urge everyone to join us in this action by supporting and implementing the aims. We need everyone who has an interest and a connection to architecture and the future of our profession, to stand up and take action.

Suggested images:

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