

communiqué /press release**For immediate release**

**CCA to Examine the Building of a Modern Myth, in
The Architecture of Reassurance: Designing the Disney Theme Parks
Fourth Exhibition in "The American Century" Series Details the Planning
and
Construction of Disney's Real-World, American Utopia**

Montréal, 17 June 1997 – From the moment it opened on 17 July 1955, in an event given

24-camera, live coverage on ABC television, Disneyland has been a key symbol of contemporary American culture. It has been both celebrated and attacked as the ultimate embodiment of consumer society, of simulation and pastiche, of the blurring of distinctions between reality and mass-media imagery. Yet for all the power of Disneyland as metaphor, almost no one has discussed the making of this place, with its far-flung colonies in Florida, Japan and France as well as affiliated city-states such as EPCOT.

With ***The Architecture of Reassurance: Designing the Disney Theme Parks***, on view at the CCA from 17 June 1997 through 28 September 1997, the Canadian Centre for Architecture in Montréal presents the first exhibition to look behind the multiple myths of Disneyland, charting the evolution of the parks through a process of becoming in which the "magic" of Disney moves ever closer to the real world.

Curated by Karal Ann Marling, Professor of Art History and American Studies at the University of Minnesota, ***The Architecture of Reassurance*** follows the layout of the parks themselves – from berm, to Main Street, and from hub to "lands": Frontierland and Adventureland, playing on the relationship between humankind, myth, and nature; Fantasyland, with its imagery from the movies; and Tomorrowland, with its once optimistic visions of the future becoming ever more sinister, playful and ironic.

Some 350 objects selected from the archives of Walt Disney Imagineering are presented. These include plans, drawings, paintings and models for the parks and their attractions. This is the first time these essential visual archives, revealing the intentions and methods of the Imagineers (as the design team for the parks is called), have been released for a full-scale critical exhibition. The vast majority, discovered during research for the exhibition, have never been seen in public. In addition to this extraordinary collection, the exhibition presents original photographs by Catherine Wagner, specially commissioned by the CCA. This major photographic project focuses on Disney's environments and structures as cultural artifacts.

Fourth Exhibition in the CCA's Multi-Year Series "The American Century"

The Architecture of Reassurance: Designing the Disney Theme Parks is the fourth exhibition in the Canadian Centre for Architecture's major series **The American Century**. Organized by Phyllis Lambert, Director of the CCA, **The American Century** seeks to cast a fresh eye on critical aspects of modern America's architectural culture – its promises and disappointments, its roots and offshoots, its unparalleled worldwide impact. "Disney's lands are part of the fabric of our lives, our imaginations and our built environment," notes Lambert. "Although they began as a peculiarly American entity in California, they have become internationalized over time, both symbolizing America to other cultures and being subtly altered by those cultures in Tokyo and Paris. It is essential to understand the impulses and mechanisms that made these places, and to see how the Disney approach to building continues to spread and evolve."

According to Nicholas Olsberg, Chief Curator of the Canadian Centre for Architecture, "one of the principal themes of **The American Century** has been the changing image of an ideal America. In ***Scenes of the World to Come***, we began by considering the futuristic Utopia that some European architects imagined they saw in American cities. We went on from there to examine the dreams of Americans themselves. In ***Frank Lloyd Wright: Designs for an American Landscape, 1922–1932***, we looked at visionary proposals for uniting America's new automobile culture with its old romance with the wilderness. In ***Viewing Olmsted***, we asked three photographers – Robert Burley, Lee Friedlander and Geoffrey James – to look again at Olmsted's achievements in relieving the harshness of modern life by bringing an ideal landscape into the city's heart. With ***The Architecture of Reassurance*** we follow the remarkable story of how Walt

Disney constructed a fantasy world based on what many Americans seemed to want in the mid-20th century. Disconcerted by the post-war world, they sought a soothing alternative to urban decay and suburban sprawl. As Disney himself wrote in a draft proposal, Disneyland was to be 'the essence of America as we know it...the nostalgia of the past, the exciting glimpses of the future.' It is immensely revealing to know that Disney added – and then crossed out – 'the complexities of the present.'"

As curator Karal Ann Marling states, "Disneyland was also the place that was a TV show, the place where the line between real life and the marvels glimpsed on the set in the corner of the living room became hopelessly blurred. It became an icon, almost from the first. But icons are hard to define. Although the word "Disneyland" often assumes a vague, emblematic aura in discussions of popular and commercial architecture, the place is rarely examined as a systematic, commercial enterprise with a self-conscious cultural agenda and a dazzling battery of techniques for realizing the ends that were envisioned. This process – Disney's distinctive approach to re-presenting the past, the present and the future in concrete form – has helped to transform our responses to architecture and the city."

Plan of the Exhibition

The exhibition is laid out along the lines of Disneyland itself. At the original park in Anaheim – like the parks in Orlando, in Tokyo and on the outskirts of Paris – the "Magic Kingdom" is separated from the outside world by an earth berm. Upon entering the park, visitors find a distinctive "hub-and-wienie" plan. An entrance avenue, Main Street, leads straight to a plaza (the hub) from which visitors may veer off to their choice of cinematic "lands," each distinguished by a vertical landmark (which Walt Disney called a "wienie") drawing visitors toward it. The greatest of the wienies is the symbol of Disneyland itself, the Castle, which stands on an axis with Main Street and serves as the entrance to Fantasyland.

In ***The Architecture of Reassurance***, an introductory gallery, functioning like the gateway through the berm enclosing Disneyland, presents Walt Disney's early thinking about a theme park, which goes back to the late 1930s. Here visitors may examine objects such as the earliest site plans (created not for Anaheim but for a lot across the street from the Disney studio in Burbank), a handmade box car from Disney's own backyard railroad, and a miniature music hall with a clockwork dancer. Also on view are

site plans for the Anaheim park, prepared by studio art directors; “blue sky” renderings made for presentation to ABC executives, bankers, and potential corporate co-sponsors; rare footage of Disney himself explaining his intentions; and souvenir maps showing the replication of the basic Disneyland plan in the other parks.

The introductory gallery leads directly to **Main Street, USA**, with displays of the original models from which Disneyland’s Main Street was built. Elevations and renderings show the unique process by which buildings were erected using the techniques of the set designer. First, artists devised elaborate, atmospheric and evocative scenic views of the imagined places. Then came studies of picturesque details and scale models. Finally, a usable building went up, whose interior and structure might or might not reflect its exterior.

Fantasyland examines the architecture, developed from the fairytale settings in Disney’s feature-length animated films – such as *Peter Pan*, *Pinocchio* and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. This gallery culminates in a study of the centrepiece of Disneyland, the Castle, and explores its moods, spaces, exterior embellishments and use in advertising. It also presents the plans that were never executed for a futuristic castle at Disneyland Paris.

Frontierland and Adventureland deal with Disney’s interpretations of the inhabited natural world. A section on the West considers the role of architecture in expressing Disney’s changing view of the meaning and character of the American frontier, culminating in models and designs for the “farm land” planned for the unbuilt Disney historical project in Virginia. Material for **Adventureland** includes designs for the Jungle Cruise attraction (loosely based on the film *The African Queen*), for the Audio-Animatronics® figures of the Enchanted Tiki Room (talking birds, singing flowers, and chanting columns), the Swiss Family Robinson Tree House, and for the latest environment to be built, the Indiana Jones™ Adventure.

Tomorrowlands are considered in the plural, since Disney’s team has continually remodeled this attraction to keep up with changing notions of what the future will (or should) bring. Visitors to the exhibition will see how Tomorrowland has shifted from a Buck Rogers space-rocket fantasy to corporate visions of new consumer products to NASA-style (or George Lucas-style) views of the future city as a glamorized hardware store. Most recently, in Paris, the Imagineers skirted the problem by constructing Discoveryland: the city of the future predicted by 19th-century visionaries such as Jules Verne. Though a

separate theme park, EPCOT is considered in this section of the exhibition since half the complex is devoted to a Future World built by Disney's corporate heirs.

Simulations – convincing replicas of known originals – began with EPCOT's national pavilions, each with its distinctive architectural icon. For Italy, the Piazza San Marco. For Mexico, a pyramid in the jungle. For France, the Eiffel Tower. Disney Imagineers built these structures in forced perspective (an old trick of the movie set designer), improving on that technique with a passion for realistic detail in signage, hardware, surface treatment and even costume and cuisine. The exhibition asks in what way EPCOT's Eiffel Tower may be "better" than the genuine article, and explores how the Imagineers went on at the Disney MGM Studios to salvage historic Los Angeles – extracting all of its "best" parts and moving them to a protected environment. These concepts of simulations, clearly related to the original Main Street idea, have since been adopted by developers as a strategy for urban shopping districts in New York, Boston, Baltimore, and other cities.

Real World Architecture encompasses the two original theme hotels at Walt Disney World – the Contemporary and the Polynesian – the only structures designed in collaboration with an architect (Welton Becket), built from modules prefabricated on the site by US Steel that were then "themed" to achieve the desired mood. The focal point of this gallery is Project X, Walt Disney's unrealized plan for a real industrial city on his 28,000-acre Florida property, inspired by his own observations and the doctrines of architect and planner Victor Gruen. Though the city was never built, many of the designers' advanced ideas concerning waste disposal and traffic circulation were realized at the Magic Kingdom and other areas of Walt Disney World. The exhibition concludes with a demonstration of the design process used in creating the new Walt Disney Gallery in Santa Ana, California. Sketches, foam-core models and examples of themed cabinetry show the Imagineers' design process at the service of retailing.

Accompanying Photography Exhibition Explores Aspects of Four Disney Parks

Parallel to the main exhibition, ***Realism and Illusion: Catherine Wagner Photographs the Disney Theme Parks*** is presented in the CCA's Octagonal Gallery. This exhibition is comprised of photographs selected from a commission carried out for the CCA by Catherine Wagner. Focusing on juxtapositions, texture, open spaces, landscape and changes in scale, Wagner's photographs reveal aspects of the four Disney

parks that are not represented in the process documents on display in the main galleries. As works of art, the photographs also capture a sense of the increasingly subtle boundaries between reality and illusion that mark the architecture of the Disney theme parks.

Major Publication to Accompany the Exhibition

In conjunction with the exhibition, the CCA and Flammarion have published *Designing Disney's Theme Parks: The Architecture of Reassurance*. The 224 page book contains a principal essay by Karal Ann Marling, guest curator of the exhibition, a foreword by Nicholas Olsberg, CCA Chief Curator as well as essays by Marty Sklar, Vice Chairman and Principal Creative Executive of Walt Disney Imagineering, historian Neil Harris, art historian Erika Doss, geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, and critic Greil Marcus. Illustrated with material from the Disney archives and the specially commissioned photographs by Catherine Wagner, the book also contains an interview with architect Frank Gehry – conducted by Phyllis Lambert and Karal Ann Marling – that discusses Gehry's work at Festival Disney. Retailing at \$49.95 CAN (paperback) and \$75 CAN (cloth), the book contains 270 illustrations, 170 in colour.

The CCA is also publishing a bilingual booklet written by Karal Ann Marling which highlights the main ideas presented in the exhibition. It will be available at the CCA Bookstore in mid August. The 48 page booklet will contain 19 illustrations and will retail at \$12.95 CAN.

Public Program Includes Film Series, Tours and Family Workshops

Public programs held in conjunction with ***The Architecture of Reassurance*** include a film series closely related to the exhibition, introductory tours of the show, day camps for youths, and week end family workshop. For information on Disney programs at the CCA, please call (514) 939-7026. These programs grow out of a principle central to the CCA's mission: the notion that architecture, as part of the social and natural environment, is a public concern.

North American Travel Schedule

Following its presentation at the CCA, ***The Architecture of Reassurance*** will travel to the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis (26 October 1997 through 18 January 1998);

UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center in Los Angeles (13 May through 23 August 1998); to the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in New York (6 October 1998 through 10 January 1999); and to the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas (14 February to 11 April 1999, to be confirmed). The exhibition may also travel to Europe and/or Japan. Location and dates to be announced.

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Information: www.cca.qc.ca/press