

**communiqué /press release****For immediate release****LABORATORIES**

## SIX YOUNG ARCHITECTURAL FIRMS IN THE CCA GALLERIES

**Montréal, 17 April 2002** – Since 11 September architects have had to rethink the very foundations of their discipline. The CCA's *Laboratories* project highlights two convergent factors: the need to establish a new stage for thought, and the emergence in Montreal of a critical mass of architectural firms for which architecture is a language of thought.

*Laboratories* centres on an exhibition to be presented between **18 April and 15 September 2002**, accompanied by a series of meetings, debates, workshops, and numerous other public programs. Six firms in business for the last 15 years or less have conceived and constructed installations in the CCA's main galleries that affirm the civilizing power of the imagination. These six firms are: **Atelier Big City, Atelier BRAQ, Atelier in situ, Bosses design, BUILD**, and **Pierre Thibault**.

"In the thoughtful response of these six Montreal teams," writes Mark Wigley, Professor of Architecture at Columbia University and consulting curator of the CCA exhibition, "we see a return to basics, to a kind of Ground-Zero condition. The installations scrutinize the elemental function of walls, floors, surfaces, light, and sound. They concentrate our attention on the interaction of bodies and buildings. What is put on display is the way architecture works rather than a particular kind of architecture."

Frédéric Migayrou, Director of the Département d'architecture at the Centre d'architecture et de culture Georges Pompidou, and also consulting curator of the CCA exhibition, writes: "The outrages of 11 September have brutally shattered the modern dream of the permanence and continuity of the built environment. Architects have therefore been forced to rethink the basics of architectural practice, which despite the homogenization of global economic culture, requires more specificity and a taking account of the exceptional."

These events have thus generated a host of questions to which the six young architectural firms involved in *Laboratories* have tried to respond in their installations.

## A Tour of the Exhibition

The exhibition opens with Atelier Big City's installation **Interchange**. It invites the visitor to take a series of "walks" that define a meeting place. In the agora thus "constructed," travellers may pause, may freeze in space. The configuration is inspired by the idea of the "architectural walking tour"; it bases itself in continuity and rootedness, and plays with existing conditions in order to expand the possibilities of urban experience.

In the second gallery Pierre Thibault presents **Writing Memory**. An architect's basic task, his "ground zero," is the creation of spaces for human beings. From prehistoric cave drawings to our urban graffiti, people have left written traces that narrate their history by anecdote. Filling the gallery is an agora whose perimeter is composed of testimonies of people from around the world. The layering of inscriptions marks the passage of time and creates distinct points at which one may see through the filter of writing.

The third gallery contains Atelier BRAQ's **Typical wall: an investigation into the wall, the site of architecture**. The wall can be a screen to protect privacy, the envelope that keeps us warm and dry, the party wall that allows us to live together in close proximity, or the permeable facade that mediates between public and private. It can be a barrier between the individual and the social, a means of privileging ownership rather than sharing. In building a wall Atelier BRAQ makes the ultimate architectural gesture: it includes or excludes.

Next, BUILD offers us **Code Zero**, an "extended threshold" intended to engage the visitor and keep him or her off balance. Eighty aluminum rods suspended from the ceiling create a "curtain wall" and narrow corridor, counterbalanced by a large transparent screen set at a 25-degree angle, supported by two 40-foot beams that cut the space diagonally. At point zero, at the moment of commencement, one must create...distortion, balance, engagement, bodies, collectivity, camouflage, surveillance, ephemerality, memory, the moment....

In the following gallery is Bosses design's **Contraption**, which appeals directly to the senses. Here the concept is a mobile experimental module, derived from the construction-site or sales-office trailer. For the "Home Sweet Home" of glossy magazines, however, this installation momentarily substitutes a different kind of interiority, in which sensory perceptions are heightened and layered. Here we may be strollers, smellers, touchers, lookers, listeners (tasters?)...and dreamers.

In the last gallery is Atelier in situ's **Test Chamber**. It is an experiment in the potential for transferring ideas and knowledge from one discipline to another. The configuration can be varied by exploiting the different spatial, acoustic, and luminous properties of its pivoting panels/doors. This installation challenges notions of scale, limitations, and reality by transposing them into different disciplines, and in observing transformations that take place during passage from one extreme state to another, as, for example, from open to closed.

## **Public Involvement**

In launching *Laboratories*, the CCA intends to generate discussion of the very foundations of architecture. Visitors are an indispensable part of this exchange of ideas, and their involvement is both desired and expected. Accordingly, at the very end of the exhibition is a space equipped with video cameras and computer terminals. First reactions, weighty analyses, simple impressions – all comments are welcome. To keep discussion going, certain comments will be posted on the *Laboratories* web site: [www.cca.qc.ca/laboratoires/](http://www.cca.qc.ca/laboratoires/).

## **Project Development**

It was in November 2001 that CCA announced the *Laboratories* project and invited applicants from the young architectural community in Montreal. The firms submitted proposals to a jury that met at the end of December to make a selection. The jury based its choices as much on the evident capacity of firms to “think outside the box” and work in an interdisciplinary environment as on the quality of their work. After this, the CCA invited the consulting curators, Frédéric Migayrou and Mark Wigley, and a committee of artists and critics to take part in discussions with the architects to help them clarify and deepen their ideas before creating the installations. March and the early weeks of April were devoted to actual construction and to installation in the galleries. The exhibition will be open from **18 April to 15 September 2002**.

For more detail on the *Laboratories* project, from its first hesitant steps last November right through to its weekend closing next September, please consult the web site specially built for the occasion: [www.cca.qc.ca/laboratoires/](http://www.cca.qc.ca/laboratoires/).

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Information: [www.cca.qc.ca/press](http://www.cca.qc.ca/press)