

communiqué / press release**For immediate distribution****THE CCA PRESENTS THE EXHIBITION *IMPERFECT HEALTH: THE MEDICALIZATION OF ARCHITECTURE*****Opening 25 October 2011, the exhibition reveals contradictions in how architecture and urban environments engage and influence health.**

R&Sie(n) (François Roche, Stéphanie Lavaux, Jean Navarro), architects.
Dustyrelief F/B-mu, Bangkok, Thailand, 2002. Wood, painting, metal,
metallic fibres, dust and resin, 11.5 cm h x 24 x 24 cm. François Lauginie,
photographer. Collection FRAC Centre, Orléans.



Édouard François, architect. *L'immeuble qui pousse*.
© Édouard François, architect

Montréal, 19 October 2011 — The Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA), Montréal, presents ***Imperfect Health: the Medicalization of Architecture***, on view in the main galleries from 25 October 2011 until 1 April 2012. Through a wide range of materials including photographs, publications, art and design projects alongside architectural models and drawings, *Imperfect Health* uncovers some of the uncertainties and contradictions in the current idea of health and considers how architecture acknowledges, incorporates and affects health issues. The exhibition questions common understandings of “positive” and “negative” outcomes within the flux of research on and cultural conceptions of health.

At a time when health is a primary concern influencing social and political discourse across the globe, it also finds increasing resonance in an architectural debate that is becoming medicalized. However, much contemporary architecture, urban planning, and landscape design seem to address these issues, and may even look to health for a new mandate to be ambitious in familiar ways. This short-cut to restored relevancy has many side-effects and it needs to be reconsidered.

Problems in everyday life are increasingly treated as medical issues and defined in medical terms. Within architecture this medicalization largely takes two forms: spaces themselves are being described with language such as “sick” or “healthy” and architecture increasingly incorporates solutions from the medical field to address issues of health. The exhibition includes projects and ideas with a range of programs – mostly non-medical – that nonetheless engage issues of health in ways that suggest

new strategies and constitute an argument for the urgent 'demedicalization' of architecture.

Modernist projects often saw a deterministic relationship between the environment and health; they tried to be curative by making radical, ultimately damaging interventions. Their history of unexpected consequences is one of the sources for the nuanced and more complex notions of health in some contemporary projects. Rather than aiming to eradicate or avoid negative factors, certain projects now actively incorporate such issues as dust, garbage, and disease management.

Many architects and designers understand the limits to what architecture can accomplish, acknowledging that efforts to achieve ideal solutions will have mixed results because of the inherent complexities and contradictions in creating architecture that works for everyone. As Machiavelli pointed out, "it is found in ordinary affairs that one never seeks to avoid one trouble without running into another."

Thematic research has uncovered examples of projects related to health issues like allergies, asthma, cancer, obesity, epidemics, and aging. These offer attractive opportunities, in an age of anxiety for transferring concepts between professional discourses – medicine and architecture – both of which are fraught with their own contemporary ambiguities and for appearing to award architecture a more important role. But these projects ultimately face the resistance of an imperfect world. New strategies are required and some are already being attempted.

Imperfect Health: the Medicalization of Architecture is curated by Mirko Zardini, CCA Director and Chief Curator, and Giovanna Borasi, CCA Curator for Contemporary Architecture, and continues the CCA's ongoing investigations into how the design and use of urban spaces shapes human wellbeing, following on from earlier exhibitions such as *Actions: What You Can Do With the City* (2008) and *Sense of the City* (2006). "With *Imperfect Health*, we feature architectural projects that acknowledge and engage with – if not always successfully – specific health issues," said curator Mirko Zardini. "The exhibition neither promises an ideal solution nor even suggests its possibility; instead it illustrates the complexity of the relationship between human health and architecture, and how this changes over time."

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition installation echoes the duality and uncertainty of the subject and materials on view. Long glass walls intersect the exhibition spaces, creating ambiguity by allowing visitors to see material through the physical barrier; the mirrored glass reinforces the notion of overlapping viewpoints, optically joining

contradictory ideas about health and the city. The continuous flow through the exhibition spaces explores specific projects and research by an international group of artists, designers, and architects in relation to broader health issues including allergies and asthma, obesity and movement, carcinogens and cancer (including its causes and treatment), disease and epidemics, and aging. Providing context are studies, publications, television monitors, and photographs. Works from the CCA's extensive collection and loans from other individuals and institutions include images by photographers Robert Adams, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Robert Burley, Lynne Cohen, Geoffrey James, Alfred Stieglitz, Ezra Stoller, among many others.

The exhibition includes specific architectural projects and studies that reflect different strategies of engaging issues of human health and disease. The 2008 design by Rem Koolhaas and OMA (Office for Metropolitan Architecture) for Maggie's Centre for cancer treatment in Glasgow, Scotland, provides an alternative to cure-oriented hospitals. Informed by the specialized needs of the patients and an understanding of the illness, the design is geared towards offering a familiar, comforting environment to diminish stress and improve the quality of patients' lives.

Other projects promote beneficial behavior in their occupants, as seen in Morphosis Architects' Cooper Union academic building in New York City. The building's design encourages physical activity, with stairs as the primary means of circulation, supported by skip-stop elevators that serve only select floors. In addition to the physical health benefits, the large, central stairway also serves as an important public space for socializing – with the aim of improving mental well-being.

Another strategy for improving the health of cities is to conceive buildings that actively enhance the quality of the surrounding urban space. A radical, unrealized example is François Roche's *Dusty Relief F/B-mu*, intended to improve the air quality of the city by attracting dust to the building's skin. While the interior would be immaculate, the building's exterior would be perpetually growing with accumulated dust and dirt. Philippe Rahm's *Public Air* engages related issues in a different light by taking advantage of natural air movement. Conceived as a full-scale ventilation structure, Rahm's building serves as an active conductor that pulls in clean, temperature controlled air from custom-built, adjacent public spaces.

Protection strategies such as quarantine also play an increasingly important role, particularly in food production and as a tool to reduce risks of global epidemics. Free-standing, full-scale paper sculptures of a cow, pig, and chicken are created for the exhibition by artist Andy Byers to illustrate the unexpected and growing role of animals in the incubation and transmission of diseases. *Pig City* by MVRDV is featured as an example of an architectural study and conceptual project in response to the rise in animal diseases resulting from mass food production.

A final area of exploration is aging, contrasting strategies such as the Sun City retirement community of the 1960s with contemporary designs of houses for the elderly by SANAA, B.I.G., and McLaughlin. Rather than creating an isolated district for old people, the recent projects aim to minimize the effects of aging and to keep the residents integrated in a mixed society. While tailored to the needs of the elderly, SANAA's Mutsukawa Day Care Center for the Elders, for example, would be comfortable and appropriate for occupants of any age.

As dramatically illustrated by Todd Haynes in the film "Safe", the notion of safety is relative and evolving. Just as hospitals are variously perceived as being safe or dangerous, depending on the context, the exhibition highlights the continually fluctuating understanding of cities as sick or healthy.

ABOUT THE CURATORS

Mirko Zardini, an architect, is the Director and Chief Curator of the CCA since 2005. He was editor of *Casabella* magazine from 1983 to 1988, *Lotus International* from 1988 to 1999, and served on the editorial board of *Domus* in 2004 and 2005. His writings have appeared in journals like *Lotus International*, *Casabella*, *ANY*, *Archis*, *El Croquis*, *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, *Domus*, *Log*, and *Volume*.

Zardini has taught design and theory at architecture schools in Europe and the United States, including Harvard University GSD, Princeton University SoA, Mendrisio Architecture Academy, Swiss Federal Polytechnic University (ETH) at Zurich, Milan Polytechnic, University of Venice, Genoa and Ferrara, and the Federal Polytechnic at Lausanne (EPFL).

Exhibitions co-curated by Mirko Zardini and Giovanna Borasi include *Other Space Odysseys: Greg Lynn, Michael Maltzan, Alessandro Poli* (2010); *Actions: What You Can Do with the City* (2008-09); *1973: Sorry, Out of Gas* (2007-08); *Sense of the City* (2005-06); and *Asfalto: Il carattere della città* (2003).

Giovanna Borasi is CCA Curator of Contemporary Architecture since 2005. She curated the exhibitions *Environment: Approaches for Tomorrow* (2006) on the work of Gilles Clément and Philippe Rahm, *Some Ideas on Living in London and Tokyo* by Stephen Taylor and Ryue Nishizawa (2008) and *Journeys: How Travelling Fruit, Ideas and Buildings Rearrange our Environment* (2010) which examined how migration transforms the physical environment in an increasingly mobile world.

Before joining the CCA, Borasi co-curated *House Sweet Home, Different Ways to Live*, Spazio Ventisette, Milan (2000), and collaborated on several exhibitions including *Asfalto, Il carattere della città* at the Milan Triennale with Mirko Zardini (2003). Borasi was an editor and writer for *Lotus International* and *Navigator*. She

served as assistant editor for the book series *Quaderni di Lotus*; and was member of the editorial staff of the graphic design magazine *Lettera*, a supplement to the architectural magazine *Abitare*.

EXHIBITION DESIGN

Brussels design firm OFFICE collaborated with the CCA curatorial team to develop the design of the Imperfect Health exhibition. The graphic design for the exhibition was created by Jonathan Hares, based in London, England and Lausanne, Switzerland.

PUBLICATION

A book accompanying the exhibition and extending this research will be published in Spring 2012 by CCA with Lars Müller. Edited by Mirko Zardini and Giovanna Borasi, it includes essays by Carla Keirns, David Gissen, Hilary Sample, Linda Pollak, Deane Simpson, Margaret Campbell, Sarah Schrank, and Nan Ellin.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

The CCA will host a number of special events and lectures in conjunction with the exhibition, aimed at framing a discourse on the spatial and physical implications of health issues. This will include a series entitled **Expert in the Library** that will bring expert conversationalists into discussions focused on everyday materials that are potentially hazardous to human health: Sun (Tania Woloshyn on 3 November, 7 pm), Fish (Stan Kubow, 24 November, 7 pm) and Dust (Pat Rasmussen, 8 December, 7 pm); a screening of the film **Safe** (27 October); and **Behind Closed Doors**, a program designed for college and university groups adapted from Jean Paul Sartre's play *Huis Clos*.

More information on the public programming related to the exhibition, can be found here: www.cca.qc.ca/imperfect

THE CCA

The CCA is an international research centre and museum founded in 1979 on the conviction that architecture is a public concern. Based on its extensive Collection, the CCA is a leading voice in advancing knowledge, promoting public understanding, and widening thought and debate on architecture, its history, theory, practice, and role in society. Visit www.cca.qc.ca for more information.

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High-resolution digital photographs are available over the Internet at the CCA press room, www.cca.qc.ca/press, under the heading "Exhibitions". To access them, the user code is **general** and the password is **journal**.

Web page: www.cca.qc.ca/imperfect

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