

communiqué / press release

CCA presents the exhibition **1973: Sorry, Out of Gas**, an unprecedented exploration of the architectural response to the 1973 oil crisis

On view from 7 November 2007 to 20 April 2008, this timely exhibition engages contemporary concerns about energy resources



Düsseldorf-Wuppertal interchange during a driving ban, Germany, 15 November 1973.
Photograph © KPA/dpa.



Solar collectors installed on rooftop at 519 East 11th Street, NYC.
Photograph © Jon Naar, 1976/ 2007.

Montréal, 10 September 2007 — The Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) presents **1973: Sorry, Out of Gas** from 7 November 2007 to 20 April 2008. Organised by the CCA, this major exhibition and its accompanying catalogue are the first to study the architectural innovation spurred by the 1973 oil crisis, when the value of oil increased exponentially and triggered economic, political, and social upheaval across the world. Featuring over 350 objects including architectural drawings, photographs, books and pamphlets, archival television footage, and historical artefacts, the exhibition maps the global response to the shortage and its relevance to architecture today.

Sparked by the combination of reduced oil production and drastically increased prices, the oil crisis marked the end of a period of constant growth in Western countries following the Second World War. Along with social and economic adjustments such as energy-saving measures and reduced activity came the understanding that unlimited development based on unrestricted oil at low prices was no longer feasible. Taking its title from familiar signs at gas stations throughout North America during those years, *1973: Sorry, Out of Gas* investigates how architecture and urbanism responded to this new reality. In contrast to the era's sense of austerity it was a time of significant developments and intense experimentation in the field of architecture.

The research and innovations of thirty years ago are of particular relevance in the context of contemporary concerns about diminishing energy resources. While influential at the time, much of the innovative work of architects, engineers, and activist groups of the period was forgotten once financial markets and energy distribution systems adjusted, and political focus diminished. Today, however, a new sense of urgency is emerging, provoked by the reality of a deteriorating environment and a finite supply of fossil fuels. *"It is of vital importance to consider the radical yet, in many cases, little-known work from the 1970s as architects today struggle to address similar issues,"* said CCA Director and exhibition curator Mirko Zardini. *"By providing insight on the forerunners of many contemporary approaches to sustainable living, the exhibition aims to increase public awareness and encourage contemporary research in the field."*

EXHIBITION CONTENTS

1973: Sorry, Out of Gas and its accompanying publication combine investigations from diverse fields, including the development and applications of both active and passive solar technologies, experiments with earth shelter building, improvements in insulation and construction materials, advances in wind power technology, and the design of "integrated systems" to manage energy sources in larger contexts. The exhibition captures the global social and political response to the oil crisis through footage of impassioned television speeches, historic photographs recording lines at gas stations and streets emptied of cars, and documentation of U.S. President Jimmy Carter's 1979 installation of solar panels on the White House roof – including one of the original panels (later removed by Carter's successor Ronald Reagan). The impact of the crisis on Western popular culture is represented by a selection of the era's board games, whose themes and titles capture the anxiety of a new lifestyle and reflect the profits of oil suppliers, as well as promotional materials such as advertising campaigns and brochures.

Occupying the CCA's main galleries, *1973: Sorry, Out of Gas* is curated by Mirko Zardini, CCA Director and Chief Curator, with Giovanna Borasi, CCA Curator of Contemporary Architecture. The exhibition is organised along interrelated themes, including *Austerity*, which reflects the impact of the oil crisis on habits and lifestyle. *Passive Solar* surveys efforts to adjust building design to take advantage of solar heat, while *Active Solar* addresses the evolution and application of technologies to capture and convert the sun's energy. *Geopolitical Consequences* examines the reactions and initiatives in the political, commercial, and cultural realms. *Insulation and Underground Buildings* presents attempts to conserve energy and integrate buildings within their natural surroundings; and *Wind* maps the evolution from earlier wind turbine designs for rural areas to new applications. Finally, *Integrated Systems* outlines projects that operate on scales of greater complexity involving food production and larger societal groups. Rather than providing a complete historical overview of the period's research, the materials on view have been selected based on their relevance to contemporary architectural concerns.



Steve Baer, designer. House of Steve Baer, Corrales, New Mexico, 1971. Photograph © Jon Naar, 1975/ 2007.

Among the exhibition highlights are individual projects by such architects as Steve Baer, Michael Jantzen, Douglas Kelbaugh, Michael Reynolds, and Malcolm Wells, who designed and built innovative homes to gain independence from existing energy distribution networks. Their little-known work broke new ground by allowing alternative concepts of energy use to guide the formal and functional design of their structures. Also

featured are the contributions of key engineers George Löf, Maria Telkes, and others, whose development of active solar power technology facilitated major architectural advances.

These autonomous projects in often remote locations were indicative of counter-culture attitudes that drove much of the innovation of the time. Yet many parallel explorations addressed the question of energy independence in urban environments. Among the most influential is a 1979 design by Oswald Mathias Ungers created in response to a government-sponsored competition for a 400-home community in West Germany. Another, more independent urban project is the 519 East 11th Street cooperative in New York City whose tenant-owners installed solar panels and a wind turbine on the rooftop to provide energy for public spaces in the building. This successful effort to gain independence from the urban power grid led to a legal battle with the local supplier and prompted a lively public debate still relevant today.

In addition to individual architects and engineers, academic institutions were some of the most active centres to develop new initiatives. Among the most ambitious and enduring is a research program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), which has been studying the mechanical, chemical, and electrical applications of solar energy since 1938. The shorter-lived Underground Space Center at the University of Minnesota (1978-1995) presented its research through several influential publications including *Earth Sheltered Residential Design Manual*.

A new typology of architectural publication evolved during this era: Do-It-Yourself books and guides described not only how to construct a home, but how to integrate the necessary energy supply. Among those featured in the exhibition are the instructive *Practical Guide to Solar Homes*, *The Self-Sufficient House*, Michael Reynolds' influential series *Earthship*, and Jay Swayze's unusual *Underground Gardens and Homes*.

The ideas and innovations brought together in *1973: Sorry, Out of Gas* culminate with the projects of several maverick groups including The New Alchemists, Montréal-based Ecol Operation, Farallones Institute, and Integrated Life Support Systems Laboratories. Their efforts focused on expanding the scale from individual housing to long-term sustainable communities. Described as "integrated systems," their work incorporates food production, housing, and waste-management. These projects offer the most complex architectural responses to the energy crisis due to their focus on developing

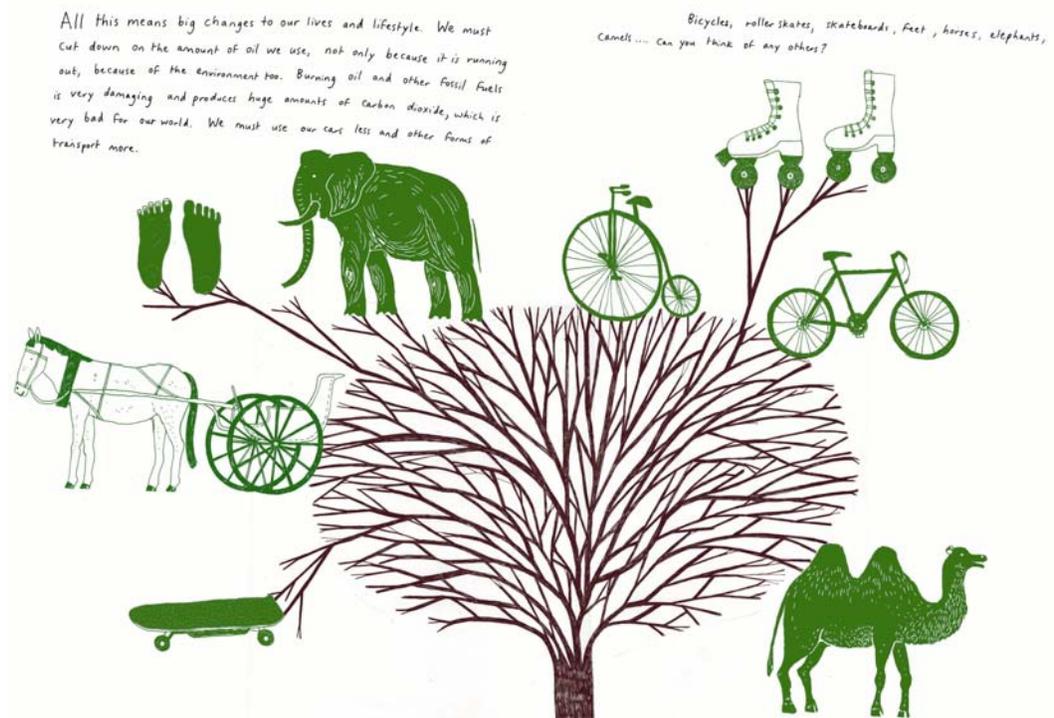
sustainability on an urban scale, and form a vital foundation for contemporary planning of future ecological viability.

EXHIBITION DESIGN

Created by Montréal-based architect Gilles Saucier of Saucier + Perrotte Architectes, the exhibition design employs an imposing, dark structure that links the different galleries and establishes a continuous flow among the content. Visitors can choose different paths through the space, where thematic ideas are centered in certain areas but the presentation of material reflects the mixing of concepts and research of the period. The graphic design is by Zab Design & Typography of Winnipeg, Canada.

CATALOGUE

The accompanying catalogue, *Sorry, Out of Gas*, is a unique publishing project combining the diverse materials assembled for the exhibition with a specifically commissioned children's component by illustrator Harriet Russell. In her 32-page story entitled "An Endangered Species," Ms. Russell introduces the exhibition's subject to a broader audience of young readers. With her distinctive drawings and hand-lettered text, Ms. Russell uses humour to describe the role of oil in daily life and to suggest alternatives to this rapidly diminishing resource



Harriet Russell, illustrator. Page from "An Endangered Species" in *Sorry, Out of Gas* exhibition catalogue, 2007.

An essay by curator Mirko Zardini follows the introductory children's component, while specific themes and projects are highlighted throughout the book in short texts written by co-curator Giovanna Borasi along with Adam Bobbette, Daria Der Kaloustian, and Pierre-Edouard Latouche.

Many of the architectural projects in the exhibition are represented through the photographs of Jon Naar, who traveled extensively across North America to document buildings and their architects and engineers in remote as well as urban contexts. His work disseminated their ideas through publications of the time, and forms an essential contribution to the CCA catalogue and exhibition.

Co-published by the CCA and Corraini Edizioni, Mantua, and designed by Massimo Pitis with Bianca Baldacci, *Sorry, Out of Gas* reproduces over 200 colour and black-and-white images on 232 pages. The volume is available at the CCA Bookstore for \$49.95 CAD.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Beginning in October, the CCA presents a series of public events in conjunction with the exhibition. All programs take place at 7 pm on Thursday nights in the CCA's Paul Desmarais Theatre and are free of charge.

Running on Empty is a series of contemporary and period documentary films that consider Western society's addiction to oil and possible cures. Screenings include *L'épopée de l'or noir*, 2004 (4 October); *The Energy War*, 1978 (11 October); *The End of Suburbia: Oil Depletion and the Collapse of the American Dream*, 2004 (18 October); and *A Crude Awakening: The Oil Crash*, 2006 (1 November).

Yesterday Today investigates architectural ideas of the 1970s in light of contemporary environmental issues through lectures by three of the central figures working to develop solutions during the time of the energy crisis. Jon Naar presents *Le Paradigme solaire /The Solar Paradigm* (8 November); Michael Reynolds, *The Earthship Sustainable Housing Concept* (15 November); and Witold Rybczynski, *Green Before Green* (29 November).

EXHIBITION CURATORS

1973: Sorry, Out of Gas is the first exhibition curated by Mirko Zardini in his role as CCA Director and Chief Curator, which he assumed in November 2005. As Visiting Curator, Mr. Zardini previously curated the CCA exhibitions *Sense of the City* (2005) and *Out of the Box: Price, Rossi, Stirling + Matta-Clark* (2004). His research, writings, exhibitions, and architectural projects engage contemporary architecture, its transformations, and its relationship with the city and landscape. A former editor of *Casabella* magazine and *Lotus International*, Mr. Zardini also served on the editorial

board of *Domus* magazine. He has taught at prestigious architectural schools, including the Swiss Federal Polytechnic University in Zurich, Harvard University, and Princeton University.

CCA Curator of Contemporary Architecture since 2005, Giovanna Borasi curated the exhibition *Environment: Approaches for Tomorrow* (2006) on the work of Gilles Clément and Philippe Rahm. Before joining the CCA, she co-curated *House Sweet Home, Different Ways to Live, Spazio Ventisette*, Milan (2000), and collaborated on several exhibitions including *Asphalt, The Character of Cities* at the Milan Triennale with Mirko Zardini (2003). Ms. Borasi was an editor and writer for *Lotus International* and *Navigatoir*. 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*.

ABOUT THE CCA

1973: Sorry, Out of Gas is the third in a series of thematic exhibitions organised by the CCA to explore contemporary issues in architecture with a specific focus on urban, social, and environmental concerns. It follows *Environment: Approaches for Tomorrow* (2006) and *Sense of the City* (2005), the groundbreaking exhibition dedicated to the sensory dimensions of urban life that have traditionally been ignored or repressed.

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 collections, the CCA is a leading voice in advancing knowledge, promoting public understanding, and widening thought and debate on the art of architecture, its history, theory, practice, and role in society today.

FUNDING

The CCA thanks Hydro-Québec and RBC Financial Group for their generous support of the exhibition.

The CCA gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications du Québec, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Department of Canadian Heritage, and the Conseil des arts de Montréal.

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High-resolution digital images are available from the CCA press website at www.cca.qc.ca/press, click on "Exhibitions".

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