



Press Release/Communiqué

For immediate release

THE CCA PRESENTS **ARCHITECTURE AS EVIDENCE**

Montréal, 15 June 2016 — **Architecture as Evidence**, presented in the Octagonal Gallery from 16 June to 11 September, explores the role of architectural expertise in a forensic legal analysis of evidence presented at a trial concerning Auschwitz.

As part of their extensive research into the subject, the exhibition's four curators, **Anne Bordeleau, Robert Jan van Pelt, Donald McKay, and Sascha Hastings**, have assembled material that together constitutes proof that Auschwitz was designed by Nazi architects as an efficient system of mass extermination. The exhibition presents reproductions of this material: twenty plaster casts of letters, drawings, photographs, purchase orders, and invoices, as well as rebuilt chimneys and gas columns from Auschwitz crematoria. The walls are stark white, and the groups of objects on display are seen as part of a falsely immaculate universe. They are a powerful evocation of the past and of the Nazis' horrific intentions.

These objects were originally collected by Robert Jan van Pelt during a careful forensic legal analysis of the architecture of Auschwitz, conducted for a libel trial that took place in London in 2000. The plaintiff denied the Holocaust took place based on a technical investigation done in the ruins of the Auschwitz crematoria by an American engineer who specialized in maintaining execution equipment, including gas chambers. The defence needed to do its own forensic investigation of the engineer's work, of the evidence provided by the ruins of the crematoria, and of the substantial documentation that has survived in Polish and Russian archives.

As the curators explain, "As architects, we think, we draw, we build. We draft the lines that will become walls and roofs for the activities that our clients foresee. Under the Nazi regime in the 1940s, this meant that a group of architects drew extermination chambers to kill thousands of people in a single operation. These architects took on the responsibility of adapting parts of pre-existing buildings into gas chambers."

In this study, the curators aim to document the systematic process of Auschwitz-Birkenau's architects. For instance, they designed rooms with gas-tight hatches, specified motors that could speed up the ventilation of a gas chamber to enable the next group of victims to enter faster, and reversed hinges on doors that would no longer open inward as dead bodies piled up against them.

Like the CCA exhibition *Architecture in Uniform* (2011), which emphasized the crucial role of architects during World War II, *Architecture as Evidence* revisits a dark aspect of the twentieth century through architectural practice. The approach of the four curators is to examine "the idea of architecture as a blank slate on which is drawn a variety of activities, analyzing decisions that at first seem innocuous but have murderous consequences, such as converting farmhouses to extermination chambers." This look into the Nazi era presents "architects and architecture at their

most basic and most terrifying.” It also brings to light the potential for architecture to act as legal and forensic proof.

As explained by CCA Director Mirko Zardini, “This exhibition focuses on an objective greater than the Canadian Centre for Architecture: studying the political role and social responsibility of architects in our modern world. Using archival documents recalling Nazi barbarism, the exhibition gives us a chance to transform architectural elements into gathering places. By offering this type of opportunity to the general public, the CCA is not only commemorating the past, but also revealing an aspect of architects' political consciences.”

Material in the exhibition is also presented as part of *Reporting From the Front*, the 2016 Venice Architecture Biennale.

CURATORS

Dr. Anne Bordeleau is Associate Professor at the School of Architecture of the University of Waterloo, Canada. She is an architect and historian whose research involves the temporal dimensions of casting, drawings, maps, buildings, and architecture more generally. She has published articles in numerous international journals (*Journal of Architecture*, *Architectural Theory Review*, *Architectural History*, *Architecture_MPS*, *Footprint*), chapters in edited books, and the monograph *Charles Robert Cockerell, Architect in Time: Reflections Around Anachronistic Drawings* (Ashgate, 2014).

Sascha Hastings is an independent arts producer, curator, and editor. She graduated from Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg in German Literature and has worked as a CBC Radio producer on *The Arts Tonight*, *The Next Chapter*, *Writers & Company*, and *Wachtel on the Arts*. She was the inaugural curator of the Cambridge Galleries Design at Riverside, and worked on the Canada Pavilion at the 2010, 2012, and 2014 Venice Architecture Biennales. Her publications include *Logotopia: The Library in Architecture, Art and the Imagination* (2008).

Donald McKay is Associate Professor at the School of Architecture of the University of Waterloo, Canada. Before graduating with a B. Arch in Toronto in 1973, McKay was an organizer in community housing. McKay then worked as an architect and planner for George Baird and for Barton Myers, and as a management consultant, renovating six of Toronto's public libraries. *Workspheres: Design and Contemporary Work Styles* (MoMA, 2001) includes McKay's furniture. His publications include *Cosmopolitan Mechanics and the Dissolution of National Boundaries* (1991), *Sanctuary* (1988), and “Logistics and Friction,” in *Metropolitan Mutations* (1989). He co-authored, with van Pelt, “Building from Sea to Shining Sea: The Architect in North America,” which appeared in *Der Architekt* in 2012.

Born in the Netherlands, **Robert Jan van Pelt** has taught at the University of Waterloo School of Architecture since 1987. Having earned his doctorate on the basis of a dissertation about the cosmic speculations on the Temple of Solomon, the focus of his subsequent research has been the (architectural) history of Auschwitz in particular and the history of the Holocaust in general. He has been active in the struggle against Holocaust denial.

The curators are grateful to many undergraduate and graduate students of architecture at the University of Waterloo, including Siobhan Allman, Piper Bernbaum, Anna Beznogova, Anna Longrigg, Michael Nugent, Bradley Paddock, and Alexandru Vilcu.

EXHIBITION DESIGN AND GRAPHIC DESIGN

The curators of the exhibition and CCA curatorial team collaborated on the exhibitions design. The graphic design was developed by the Montreal agency UNIFORM.

RELATED PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Curators Robert Jan van Pelt et Anne Bordeleau give a **public presentation** of their research on the opening day of the exhibition, Thursday, **16 June**, at **6 pm**. The **vernissage** follows from **7 pm to 9 pm**. Admission is free.

ABOUT THE CCA

The CCA is an international research centre and museum founded in 1979 on the conviction that architecture is a public concern. The institution is a leading voice in advancing knowledge, promoting public understanding, and widening thought and debate on architecture, its history, theory, and practice, and its role in society today.

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