2021 ACSA Collaborative Practice Award Submission

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AN ATLAS OF COMMONING
A travelling exhibition as collaborative platform for exchange, mutual learning and community engagement
EXHIBITION VIEW with the Atlas in the center
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Commoning the City is a research-based urban design studio at Carnegie Mellon University School of Architecture, exploring the negotiation between top-down planning and bottom-up transformation of cities. While the year-long studio culminates in individual thesis projects, the Fall semester taught by Stefan Gruber is structured around collective case study research on practices and spaces of commoning. The research focus of the studio, now in its fourth iteration, has led to the travelling exhibition ‘An Atlas of Commoning’ by ifa (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen), and curated in collaboration with ARCH+, the German journal for architecture and urbanism.

The Atlas assembles grassroots initiatives in which citizens come together, pooling resources in order to transform and claim their right to the city. In response to the growing realization that neither the state nor the market support the even distribution and access to resources, communities around the world are taking matters into their own hands in pursuit of a more sustainable, open and solitary life. Together the projects demonstrate how citizen-led projects, rendered seemingly marginal by contemporary forms of domination (class, gender, race), are nonetheless instrumental in building community resilience. More importantly, these projects show that these alternatives are already in the making, and together, when seen as a network, already constitute a critical mass. Their collective spatial practices outline the possibility of reframing the city as commons.

The long-term project is collaborative in several ways: On the one hand, the practices and spaces of commoning assembled in the Atlas render visible the collective power citizen-led initiatives can have in shaping the built environment. On the other hand, the exhibition itself acts as a connector and enables mutual learning and exchange. It aims to support commoners in scaling up, out and deep as they aspire to systems-level change. Finally, the production of the exhibition itself represents a huge collaborative endeavor to which many stakeholders contributed: from ordinary citizens or commoners sharing their insights and experiences, to professional designers, editors, exhibition makers and artists helping to frame the research in such a way as to make it accessible to a wider audience. Thus, the studio both practices and reflects critically on collaboration.

The exhibition opened in Berlin and had its international premier at Carnegie Mellon's Miller ICA in Pittsburgh. Post-Covid, it will continue travelling around the world for ten years. The Atlas is conceived as a growing knowledge archive to which new case studies are added in each host city. In the studio, students analyze and document selected case studies by means of field work, interviews and secondary research. The research is then synthesized in drawing-collages and short portraits that in conjunction with photos constitute the Atlas display at the center of the exhibition. The exhibition also serves as event space for workshops, seminars and discussions. Thus, beyond a mere exhibition the project is conceived as platform for exchange between architects, community groups and citizen-led initiatives. It serves as facilitator for conversations between grass-roots initiatives seeking agency in transforming their right to co-producing the city, access and share ideas and experiences. Many events are hosted during the exhibition ranging from open space meetings, to salons, from tours to local initiatives to symposia. When shown at Carnegie Mellon University, the exhibition contributed to bring a broader audience to campus, and vice versa taking the academy to the streets. The wide range of media from large scale interactive models and installations to films aims to provide plural entry points to the commons debate for a diverse audience. Accordingly, the design of the exhibition is also an attempt to diversify how we learn and engage with ideas.

The exhibition is both a venue to present the studio’s research as well as a vehicle for new knowledge production. During the show, classes took place in the exhibition, students referenced the Atlas and a small satellite library on the commons. Students participated in the co-production of a space that thereafter becomes a site of collaborative learning and exchange, as in a closed positive feedback loop that amplifies itself.
The COMMONS LIBRARY offers a place of study during the duration of the exhibition.
FIELD WORK in Berlin, Hamburg, Zurich, Vienna and Pittsburgh.
General Sisters has an expansive bottom line:

1. Our investment transforms an unusable building into a building with equity that will remain in the hands of our neighbors.

2. From the foundation, to the roof, to its contents, General Sisters is built from the generous and active redistribution of resources, manifesting a tangible practice for re-thinking capitalism, and consumer agency while emphasizing the interconnectedness of the economy, the environment, the social and quality of life.

3. People want to be healthy and nourished regardless of income. Not one of us is healthy until all of us are healthy.

4. General Sisters is a catalytic space for regional and neighborhood food enterprises as well as a common, safe place for neighborhood residents to gather, exchange and learn together.

The ground is contested in Braddock, Pennsylvania. General Sisters is the process of building a grocery store as neighbors with the intent to cultivate the ground, and “make healthy eating and eating around food available within walking distance for the neighborhood.” Instead of consumerism, General Sisters encourages collaborative production, sharing skills and resources taking the neighborhood’s environmental and economic realities as a call to action, when proposed fracking operations upstream threatened the community’s health, the store’s founders paused production to enter into legal battle against the frackers. The community solution—a new zoning ordinance protecting the contested property from industrial use—would also rezone the property of General Sisters as residential. The fight continues as nearby U.S. Steel plant Edgar Thompson has agreed to host fracking pads. The cycle resumes resources in the ground are leveraged against the struggles for food equity, racial and environmental justice.

For more information, visit: www.generalsisters.com
AN ATLAS OF COMMONING display with take-away posters
AN ATLAS OF COMMUNITY ARCHITECTURE

SPACES OF COLLECTIVE PRODUCTION
An exhibition by Isa Lege
In collaboration with Arch+S

JUNE 29 – SEPTEMBER 22, 2019
RECEPTION
Sat., June 29, 6:30–8:30pm
SALON SERIES
Ketti Fierz, Jan Potocsky, P.N. Pratt
Sun., July 28, 7–9pm
SYMPOSIUM
Thursday, May 2 – 6, 2019
Thaddeus Wolfe, NY – Ram, Sept. 1

MILLER ICA AT CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY
miller-ica.cmu.edu
3002 Forbes Ave.
Open to the Public

September 20, 2019
9:00AM – 4:30PM
IN COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS, CMU

MORNING SESSION ON COMMUNING THE CITY
RENÉE TRIBBLE
PLAYING MAKER
KRISTIN HUGHES + MARY-LOU ARSCOTT
LAHAINA STREET EXPERIMENT CMU
TOBIAS ARMORST
DESIGNER, SANTA CRUZ COLLEGE
ANTJE STEINMÜLLER
UNIVERSITY OF APPELDOORN
KAREN ABRAMS
THE HEIZZ ENDOWMENT
MATHIAS HEYDEN
DIANA
ANNE-MARIE LUBENAU
BRUNEL LECTURE SERIES
A PANEL DISCUSSION WITH
TERRI BALTIMORE
THE LIVING LABORATORY
STEVEN DANES
CMU SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE
CHRISTINA HOWELL
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
www.soa.cmu.edu/events

September 19, 2019
6:30PM
AT KRESGE THEATER, CMU

TEDDY CRUZ + FONNA FORMAN
SUSTAINABLE DESIGN LECTURE SERIES

September 21, 2019
11:00AM CURATOR’S EXHIBITION TOUR
12:30PM SITE VISITS TO EAST END FOOD COOP,
CONSTRUCTION JUNCTION & COMMUNITY FORGE
FREE TOUR WITH RSVP
WWW.MILLER-ICA.CMU.EDU

ANNOUNCEMENTS
OPEN SPACE WORKSHOP - COMMONING PITTSBURGH

Workshop with community members from local citizen-led initiatives
OPEN SPACE WORKSHOP - COMMONING PITTSBURGH & DESIGNING FOR A COMMONS TRANSITION SYMPOSIUM
BUS TOUR TO LOCAL COMMONING INITIATIVES

Construction Junction, the Food Coop, and Community Forge
STUDIO

Participating students from Carnegie Mellon’s Master of Urban Design program, and the studio “Commoning the City” co-taught by Stefan Gruber (Fall) and Jonathan Kline (Spring):

Fall 2017
Ernest Bellamy, Tamara Cartwright, Yidan Gong, Paul Moscoso Riofrio, Chun Zheng, Lu Zhu.

Fall 2018
Yirui Wang, Alvin Wong, Chi Zhang, Yang Gao, Jianxiao Ge, Chase Kea, Rebecca Lefkowitz, Sai Narayan Ramachandran, Deepanshi Sheth, Sujan Das Shrestha, Gautam Thakkar, Aditi Thota.

Fall 2019
Srinjoy Hazra, Ghalya Alsanea, Rachel Park, Ryan Smith, Yilun Hong, Suprima Joshi, Jinhan Liang, Ryan McMahon, Abhinav Singh, Xianfu Sun, Wenzheng Wu.

Fall 2020
Clover Chau, Sharleen Devjani, Cassandra Howard, Sameedha Mahajan Longney Luk, Bingjie Sheng, He Su, Yashasvi Tulchiya, Yiya Wang, Xiaoran Zhang.

EXHIBITION

Curatorial team:
Anh-Linh Ngo, Mirko Gatti, Christian Hiller, Max Kaldenhoff, Christine Rüb (ARCH+); Elke aus dem Moore (ifa); Stefan Gruber (CMU)

Research partners:
School of Architecture, Carnegie Mellon University
Pittsburgh and and Technische Universität Berlin, Institute of Architecture, Prof. Rainer Hehl

Curator of Pittsburgh edition:
Stefan Gruber (CMU)

With contributions from:
Morehshin Allahyari & Daniel Rourke; clemens krug architekten & Bernhard Hummel Architekt (Team: Oliver Clemens, Anna Heiligemeir, Bernhard Hummel, Emma Williams); Assemble & Granby Workshop; Iwan Baan; Brandhuber + Christopher Roth; DAAR Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency; Theo Deutinger; Eureka; Manuel Herz; Sandi Hilal, Philipp Misselwitz & Anne Misselwitz; Immo Klink; Kotti & Co; Kuehn Malvezzi; Angelika Levi; Golan Levin (F.A.T. Lab) & Shawn Sims (Sy-Lab); Makoko Waterfront Community; Tukano Maloca; Miethäuser Syndikat; National Union of Sahrawi Women; NLÉ Architects; PlanBude Hamburg, Svenja Baumgardt & Sylvie Kretzschmar; Common Ground e.V. & Nachbarschaftsakademie; Quest – Florian Köhl / Christian Burkhard; Martha Rosler; Harald Trapp / Robert Thum; Urban-Think Tank, Chair of Architecture and Urban Design ETH Zürich; WiLMa GmbH; Samson Young.

The “Atlas of Commoning” also includes works by: Airbnb; ARGE ifau | HEIDE & VON BECKERATH; Atelier d’Architecture Autogérée; BARarchitekten; Bau- und Wohnungseisenhaft Spreefeld Berlin eG; Carpaneto Schoeningh Architekten; City in the Making; FATkoehl Architekten; Die Zusammenarbeiter; El Campo de la Cebada; Genossenschaft Kalkbreite; Genossenschaft Kraftwerk1; Go Hasegawa and Associates; IBeB GbR; Müller Sigrist Architects; Refugee Accommodation and Solidarity Space City Plaza; Schneider Studer Primas; Stiftung House of One – Bet- und Lehrhaus Petriplatz Berlin; Gemeinde Yoshino; ZUS (Zones Urbaines Sensibles). Pittsburgh initiatives include Breathe Project; City of Asylum; Community Forge; Garfield Community Farm; General Sisters, General Store; Latham Street Commons; Manchester Bidwell Corporation; The Braddock Carnegie Library.