

Electoral District: Province of Ontario Intern Architect Non-Voting Seat Candidate Statement

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My creative path is driven by a passion to develop community. I see the process of making things, particularly interventions that shape our public realm, as a source of inexhaustible creative energy. I have come to understand my role as someone who can harness this creative energy, sculpt its potential, and manifest its formal properties - be it through the transformative force of street art or the interdisciplinary vision of resilient architecture.

In my youth, I aspired to be a humanitarian muralist, a fusion of Diego Rivera and Mahatma Gandhi. I thought public art and non-violent resistance were inseparable, and dreamed of the day a graffiti tag (affectionately referred to as "bombing" in the sub-culture) could actually destroy both built and imaginary walls that trap community. After painting in some of the most derelict communities in five continents over fifteen years, from Soweto, South Africa to Comuna 13 in Medellin, Colombia, I realized that it was never really about the art. It was the relationships that I developed with other artists, business owners, landlords, city officials, community organizations, even police - an endless list of stakeholders that were surprisingly possessive of what was to be inscribed on a previously unimpressive wall. It was this groundwork that made the process of "revitalization" meaningful. The relationships seem to carry more weight, and in some cases, last longer than the mere paint on brick and mortar.

As I transition from the world of public art to architectural practice, and continue to untangle the wonderful web in between, I am blessed to finally experience how revitalization spearheaded by architecture is so latent with positive externalities. Strategies to stimulate/sustain community engagement lay dormant in conversations about access and circulation, as opposed to bandaids like murals and interior finishes. I recall spending seven years working out of the basement of a Bloor Street West community centre developing what we now call social enterprise, struggling back then to find ways for unemployed artists to make a living off their expertise. While I can by no means compare the work involved in the capacity of a youth mentor and project coordinator to the vast orchestration of an architect leading the design of a multiple major occupancy community hub, I recognize that the capacity to stimulate faith in our peers, to initiate meaningful dialogue, and drive creative projects are perhaps traits that transcend the professional discipline.

Some of my contemporaries and allies in the development of arts incubators in Toronto, visionaries such as Che Kothari (Manifesto) and Gavin Shepperd (theRemixProject), are leaders of a generation of creatives in our city that are changing how education, the arts and community engagement are defined, funded and established. My goal is to spark this same open-minded, cross-platform ambition as a representative of the intern architect community - an attitude that believes that there are undiscovered efficiencies, alliances and conversations that can propel the productivity and vision of our incumbent professional practice.